


# interzone

JUNE 1999

Number 144

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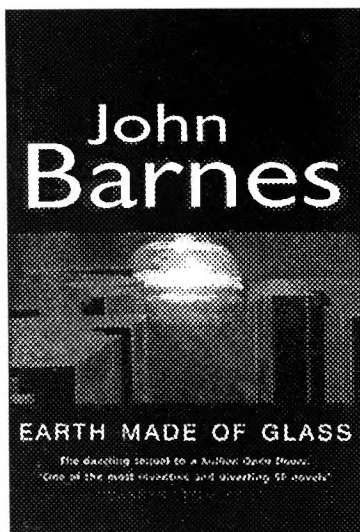


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**Gary Westfahl • Nick Lowe • interview with Patricia Anthony**



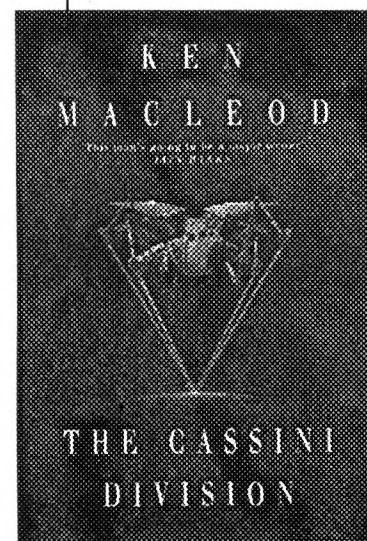




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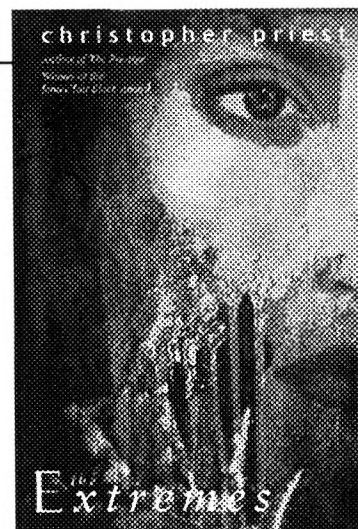
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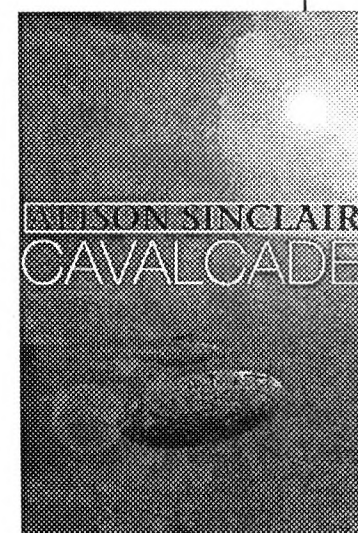
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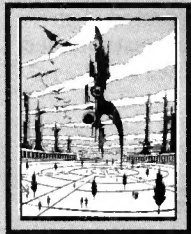
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# interzone

science fiction & fantasy

JUNE 1999

Number 144

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# INTERFACE



## Last Word on Ballard and Luckhurst

Dear Editors:

As you know, my original letter regarding Roger Luckhurst's Ballard study was a personal one to you and I now feel it was a mistake to have published it because both David Mathew and John Brady ("Interaction," *IZ* 142) are perfectly right – I haven't read the Luckhurst book and it was stupid to air a prejudice in reference to it. So I take back the references and will keep my prejudices to myself. Maybe it isn't fair to include Luckhurst's book in my comments. However, John Brady's comparison doesn't convince me either.

First I'd like to make it clear that I remain a great admirer of Ballard and put my money where my mouth was to publish "The Assassination Weapon" and other stories which I had begged Ballard for. These "condensed novels," not Ballard's conventionally written fiction or his conventionally written essays, were what baffled some readers. The essays were written in excellent ordinary English and worked to help clarify Ballard's concerns. They were addressed to the constituency which bought *New Worlds* off the Smith's bookstalls where it was regularly displayed. We called that constituency "the public." That public didn't, in our experience, find them rubbish. But there were no academics involved anywhere, unless amongst the readers. And not a fucking "text" in sight.

It's true that a great deal of *New*

*Worlds*' early thrust was spent in trying to persuade readers to read and enjoy Ballard – one only has to look back through the early issues to see how much Ballard was publicized and how much enthusiasm many readers had for his work at the time. Even before he wrote any of his more experimental fiction, he was regarded as the leading British imaginative writer in the way that Kurt Vonnegut was regarded as the leading US writer. For almost ten years, Ballard fully established his literary credentials, his authority with the reader, long before the more experimental work started appearing. That authority gave him attention from readers he might not otherwise have received. In my view Ballard's "response to the new" was as powerful, as appropriate and as original as Burroughs's, whom we both admired and to whom we both looked for inspiration (the influences were sometimes mutual – Burroughs borrowed from NW) – and an understanding of what could be done. All within the context of publication, readers, the ordinary commercial factors of earning a living and running a magazine.

We were, whether some of them liked it or not, addressing the public. We weren't ever – and this was indeed policy – addressing either the literary establishment, academia or a "little magazine" audience. We didn't need private languages, except the rationales by which we kept ourselves focused. (Private languages are reminiscent of scientology – they sound very authoritative and probably make the user feel more in control of things but aren't too useful in real life.) Elsewhere the popular arts were developing and growing more sophisticated. We believed an "ordinary" readership would grow familiar with the novelty and begin to understand the stories on their own merits. By exposure and demonstration. I've never seen much point in trying to talk someone into sharing an enthusiasm. I doubt very much if Ballard's thoroughly deserved acceptance into the English literary canon has had much to do with academic examination but quite a lot to do with a public recognition of his extraordinary intelligence, his finely-tuned instincts, his idiosyncratic and brilliant talent. I think our policy on NW was the right one – demonstration rather than theory. Our policy was always to run something up the flagpole and see what came down. And what came down, in Ballard's case, was some of the best fiction written since the War.

As an ironic footnote: one of the greatest condemnations of Ballard and the so-called sf New Wave came at a Brighton Arts Festival conference in the 60s when the painter Richard Hamilton (*Homage to Chrysler Corpo-*

*ration, Kennedy as an Astronaut*, etc.) got up and condemned all this novelty and "bullshit" and suggested sf go back to the sound values established in *Astounding* magazine.

**Mike Moorcock**  
*Lone Pines, Texas*

## A Prop to Mediocrity?

Dear Editors:

Polly Marshall's excellent interview with Jeff Noon in *Interzone* 142 helped crystallize my irritation with some of the non-fiction content of your magazine. Reading reviews and articles by the likes of Stableford, Clute and Westfahl is like listening to bald men disputing ownership of a comb. No one in the "real world" knows or cares about John Campbell's editorship of *Astounding Stories*, or what the latest lit-crit jargon definition of fantasy is. To that seriously endangered species, the intelligent general reader of science fiction and fantasy, such squabbles are exercises in Laputan pointlessness, irrelevant to all but that clichéd (but nonetheless extant) gaggle of geeks for whom the science-fiction "world" – with its self-congratulatory Conventions and onanistic website culture – is a substitute for love, life and a clear complexion.

Jeff Noon is right to oppose having his work on the science-fiction shelves. Who wouldn't be? These days, those shelves are barren of anything of quality, creaking as they are under the weight of exploitative TV spin-offs and the umpteenth volume of Terry Pratchett's embarrassingly suburban whimsy, the nursery slopes of fantastic literature from which boredom is the only graduation. All the criticisms of science fiction, fantasy and fandom levelled by outsiders seem vindicated when you glance along bookshelves bare of successors to Philip K. Dick but teeming with aspirant David Eddinges. If fantastic fiction is to be considered anything other than a comfort blanket for the kind of back-bedroom casualties who still wear black armbands in memory of *Blake's* 7, its practitioners are going to have to get out and engage with a wider culture, leaving behind the common-room in-jokes of NERDCON '99 and the disputed biopsies of forgotten fanzine editors for an arena where what you've got to say matters more than which literary tropes you use to say it. In terms of literary quality, the best sf and fantasy writers – Wells, Kafka, Ballard, Borges – have always seemed at home on the general fiction shelves. Genre is a prop to mediocrity, fandom a justification of obsession.

**Adrian Fry**  
*Swindon, Wiltshire*



Dear Editors:

Gwyneth Jones's "La Cenerentola" (IZ 136) was the stand-out story from 1998. Others I particularly liked were Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff's "Who Have No Eyes" (IZ 134), Alastair Reynolds's "On the Oodnadatta" (IZ 128), Nicholas Waller's "The Travel Agent" (IZ 130) and Dominic Green's "That Thing Over There" (IZ 132), with another dozen-and-a-half which weren't far behind.

*Interzone* seems to have a couple of above-average stories per issue. If the number of clearly stand-out stories is down on recent years I suspect that's more because the overall quality has risen rather than because you're publishing fewer of them.

How odd (and sad) to have a whole year without Greg Egan. It's also been a long time since your pages were graced by Ian R. MacLeod, Ian Lee, Richard Calder or Ian McDonald. Good to have a regular supply from Alastair Reynolds, though. Of the newer writers, I'm looking forward to more from Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff, Alexander Glass, Timons Esaias and Nicholas Waller.

**Alasdair Montgomery**  
Engineering & Physical Sciences  
Librarian  
University of Wales, Swansea

**Editor:** Thanks for the comments, Alasdair (and thanks to all the others who have also sent in their story-ratings for last year; the poll results will appear next issue). We have a new Richard Calder story in the present issue, and a new Greg Egan is expected soon; but as for the three Ians, I'm afraid there is no news to report. (Come on, guys, you're in demand!)

## Last Train to the Future

Dear Editors:

Has anyone tuned into the ITV six-part serial *The Last Train* (April-May 1999)? It seems to me that though it's a fairly derivative concept, and uses a cheap way of getting the survivors into the future, it still makes for fairly gripping television and has exhibited a sly usage of "Ballardisms" you wouldn't normally expect from a prime-time series. Reasonable cast and script, centred on (for me) an intriguing idea of making the twin male protagonists cop and thief, albeit weakened by falling into a white/black stereotype.

*The Last Train* really scores though in the set-dressing and design department – as far as I can tell it hasn't had to fall back on matte paintings too often to convey the sense of destruction. I really like the attention it pays

to little details, like the vegetation that's grown up around the remains of the train-crash from 14 years ago. It also pretty expertly conveys a sense of the unknown, of dread at what's out there, even if "it" is only a pack of Rot-tweilers and a couple of mangy Alsations – the budget didn't stretch too far obviously. The Ballardian influences are seen in the businessman who seems quite at home wandering through the devastation and finding it releases suppressed urges. Also the device of having the world destroyed by the shockwave/wind generated by the asteroid impact harks all the way back to JGB's *The Wind from Nowhere*.

OK, it's a long way from matching Nigel Kneale's 1979 *Quatermass* TV serial which, for me anyway, remains the best evocation of the apocalyptic scenario, but in terms of mainstream-channel serious sf drama series, it's light years ahead of the BBC's crap alien-invasion serial from last year.

**Jeremy Palmer**  
jpalmer@informix.com

Dear Editors:

Issue 141 was very enjoyable, with a collection of stories well above the norm. The best for me had to be Paul Di Filippo's "Angelmakers" – an attention-holding piece of real sf telling just enough about the background to keep it plausible. (A pity about the typo on p28: "Rand was not placated" – Brewster, surely?) Chris Beckett's "Valour" was the least successful for me; although the underlying idea of the story was an interesting one the ending didn't seem strong. It was good to see some foreign sf. Hiroe Suga's "Freckled Figure" was very firmly in the mould of what else I've managed to read of Japanese science fiction, very romantic, a strong focus on the beauty of forlorn love similar to teenage obsession, but still managing to stay the right side of saccharine. More of this please, and many thanks to Dana Lewis and Stephen Baxter for a very smooth and easy-to-read translation.

An interesting letter from David Forbes, clearly someone who takes his *Doctor Who* seriously, and he makes some telling points with clarity. I do wonder, however, when people apply phrases like "cognitive estrangement" to critiques of the strengths of programmes like this if they are not getting a *little* too involved and defending a little too hard. I watched *Doctor Who* as a child and haven't watched it since. As a child I didn't have to justify my viewing, but then perhaps the adult themes went over my head. Perhaps not.

Chris Gilmore's reviews are very enjoyable. I look forward to reading them each month, as I now also do

with David Mathew's and, when they appear, Gwyneth Jones's. Gary Westfahl's first columns seemed, to me, to be deliberately provocative and attention-seeking and I wondered what they were doing in *Interzone*. I think the majority of the criticism he received was justified and deserved. Now he has calmed down a bit and I can tolerate them, but it still seems he's more interested in a reaction than presenting an argument.

**Dave Gullen**

Dave@gullen.demon.co.uk

## Westfahl on Fantasy

Dear Editors:

I'm unable to avoid the conclusion that Gary Westfahl is trying to have it both ways in "The Nine Billion Names of Fantasy" (IZ 141). For a start, as the bulk of the essay is a fairly disparaging review of *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, why did he choose both to leave his name on the title page and to accept an award on its behalf? If he felt like that about it, he should surely have dissociated himself from every part except his own, signed articles. The line about being "proud to be associated" with it reads like a crude attempt at fence-mending, tacked on much too late.

Moreover, while he may not like Clute's choice of terms, the rationale behind them is transparent enough: he has chosen to address certain literary terms as if they were Jungian archetypes, for the perceived reason that they are treated archetypally in genre fiction. We all know what is meant by Arcadia or The Knight of the Doleful Countenance, so the only reasonable debate would centre on their archetypal status. I would add in passing that if they become established they will shortly cease to look mannered – literary history is full of examples. Who would have guessed that such monsters as Negative Capability (Keats) and Objective Correlative (Eliot) would evolve into staples of the vocabulary?

The term "Instauration Fantasy" is, I agree, clumsy; but the more natural "Restoration Fantasy" collides fatally with the better known Restoration Comedy, which would inevitably contaminate its meaning. That leaves us with the charge that Clute uses it to beg questions about the value of specific works. Perhaps he does; or perhaps he can provide a few examples of seriously bad instauration fantasies. If he can't, I seem to remember having reviewed one in *Interzone* 77.

**Chris N. Gilmore**

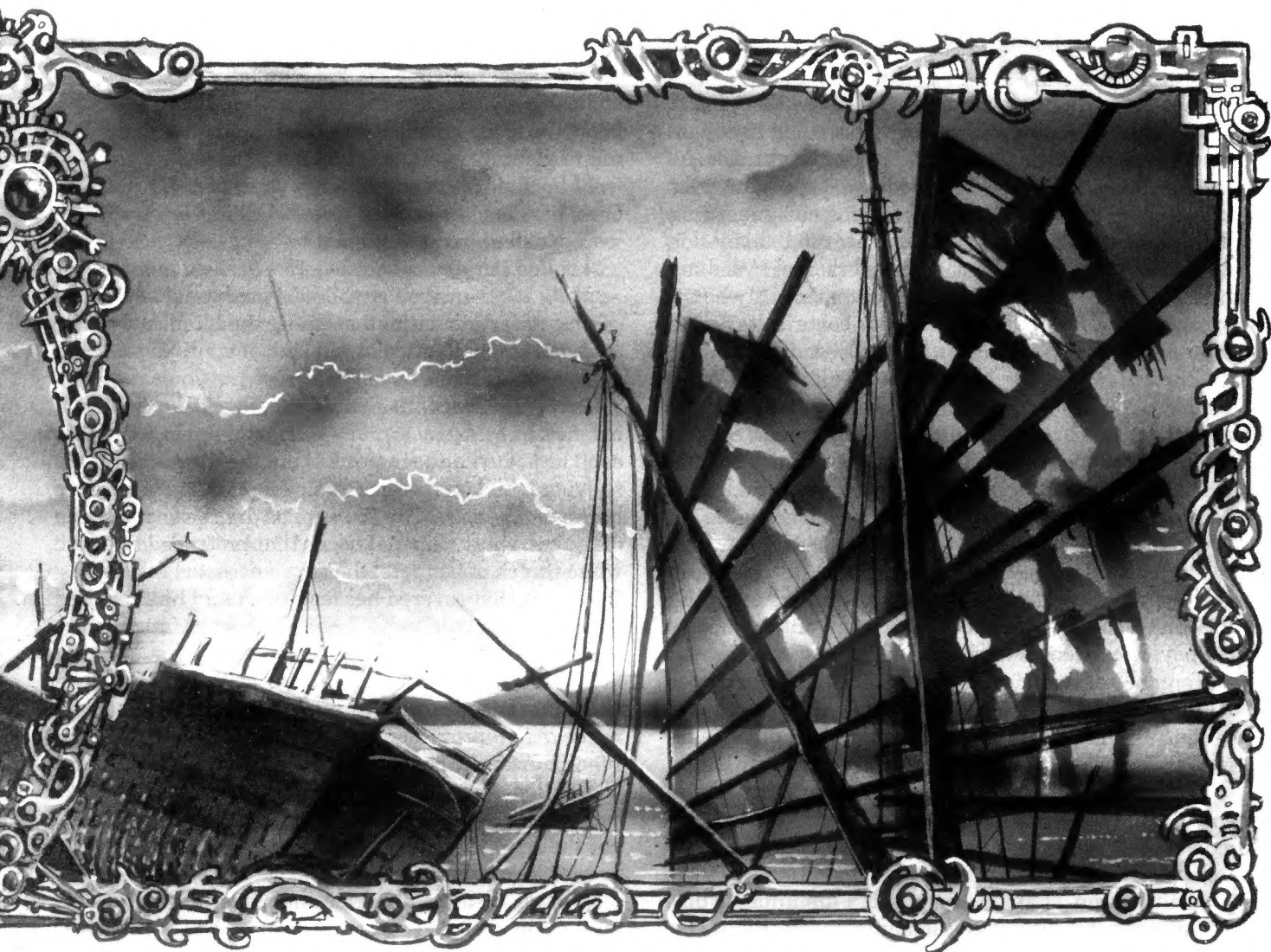
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*Richard Calder*

# Holígmos





“You will recall,” said Gala, “that you are to meet with a client at eight o’clock.” But at that moment the gross, impertinent antipodean who I had called out the previous evening chose to lunge at me, and all business, save that of despatching my opponent with the utmost effect, was banished from my thoughts. “Sus,” continued Gala as the arc of the Tasmanian devil’s *itak* came near to shaving off a portion of my nose, “you really must bring this present affair to conclusion. We’re not so flush that you can afford to pass up on a *client*.” Gala had only underscored, of course, what was already uppermost in my mind: that I needed to wound, otherwise incapacitate or kill my man *now*. My new client – my first in many months –

promised to provide much needed revenue. I could not afford to keep him waiting.

I brought my own *itak* down against my opponent’s weapon, driving his arm towards the sand. The world knows me for a swordsman of surpassing excellence. But the weapon I had been constrained to use that day continued to refuse the sophisticated swordplay I demanded of it (the *itak* is but an excuse for a sword; indeed, it is little more than a machete), and I found myself forced to fall back on certain dirty-fighting skills that, if neither excellent, surpassing, nor even skills I liked to readily own up to, had nevertheless kept me alive whenever my own beloved blade, *Espiritu Sancto*, was beyond reach.

With my *itak* deployed in keeping the Tasmanian’s *itak* pointed towards the ground, I stepped forward and kicked my opponent in the stomach. It was an non-chalant, indeed, rather dignified kick, if not one imbued with the kind of grace that, I like to believe, characterizes my essential nature, whether I be wearing the mask of an artist, scholar, lover, or (most particularly) an ex-captain of the armies of the Darkling Isle. But it

had the desired effect.

With a grunt the uneducated savage who had besmirched the reputation of the woman I admired above all women, both inhuman and human, retreated to the nearby shoreline, surf lapping about his thonged feet. I laughed.

The rush of self-congratulation I felt was short-lived. It was dawn, the sun was low in the sky, and my opponent's back had been turned towards its bright disc. As the Tasmanian doubled over with delayed shock, my eyes were assaulted by a barrage of furious early morning light. Stopped in my tracks, I let my arms fall to my side and stood stock-still, dazed, defenceless. Pain filled my head, and then found its way to my stomach. My hangover, which had dogged me during our boat ride to Snake Island, became disproportionate, truly monstrous.

"Ritchie, put up your guard!" cried Gala. I spat. What remained of last night's complement of liquor had filled my mouth and demanded instant disemboisement. Silhouetted against the sun, my opponent grew dim. The duel which I had called for but six hours previous no longer seemed, on this too-bright morning, such a good idea.

"Ritchie!"

The sun's evil eye was inescapable. Its light was everywhere, glittering on the sea and burning away the mist that scudded over the Zambales mountains across the bay. The inadequate filter of the clouds was suffused with rashes of cruel brilliance.

"Ritchie!"

The Tasmanian had recovered and was again advancing. His face was flushed from exertion and nightly binges at my favourite bar; the bar he had once-too-often blighted with his presence. For a fat man, he was disconcertingly agile. I lifted an empty hand in a gesture of parley, keeping my right hand and the *itak* close to my side.

"Wait," I said. "I am discomposed. I am unfairly disadvantaged. This is not gentlemanly, surely. First, you choose to fight with weapons only louts and oafs are familiar with, and then you have me up at an hour only schoolchildren, milkmaids and insomniac maiden aunts can tolerate. Is this fair?"

"Popinjay!" he said, with a taunting sweep of his blade.

I shrugged. "The dawn," I said. "It is absurdly dramatic. I refuse to walk the boards of a stage that is illuminated by such a vulgar, demotic light. Look! That sun-inebriated cloud: it is enough to have Turner leaping from his grave to say 'I was wrong, the sun is not God, he is the very devil!'"

"Charlatan! Impostor! We all know the measure of you, my man. Now listen: you chose to call me out, and now you're going to have to count the cost of your idiocy." The unsympathetic brute's coarse, antipodean vowels exacerbated my already considerable discomfort. But my obvious state of helplessness had, at least, checked his homicidal momentum. He stood as I stood now, his hands at his sides. "And don't talk to me about *gentlemanly*," he continued, glancing at Gala, "we agreed upon a *recontre*; there should be no seconds."

"She is the object of this quarrel," I said, passing a hand across my throbbing brow. "She has a right to be here." The truth was I had been unsuccessful in dissuading her.

Not that I had pitched my arguments with any great conviction. I fight honourably, but I believe in having insurance, and Gala – I had discovered over the years – would do her best to indemnify any hurt I might sustain by swiftly revenging me. She was no mean fighter herself.

The Tasmanian smiled. It was a fat man's smile, the smile of a colossal baby, a smile both ludicrous and sinister. The smile broadened as he allowed himself the luxury of gloating over my imminent demise. "Do you still feel I insulted her? I merely gave you a friendly warning. Girls like her," he nodded towards Gala, "are trouble."

"You called her a *malignos*."

"I called her a *malignos whore*." I raised an eyebrow.

"Well, it's true she's a whore," I said, unable to gain-say his assertion without seeming the blindest of fools, "but *malignos*? That shows a lack of civility."

"But she *is* a *malignos*!"

Gala pulled back the cowl of her silk cloak. She shook out her hair. A thick mane cascaded down her back, each lock, curl and ringlet having the appearance of a shaving found on the floor of a silversmith. The mass of hair caught the rays of the sun, as did the silvery bone of the two short elliptical horns that protruded from the white thatch of her pate; the mica-encrusted fingernails; the scales that covered her face, neck and half-exposed shoulder. How palely she shone. With what fire. The fire of hell, and the fire of heaven.

"I've been called many things," said Gala. "In the Darkling Isle the term *teratoid* is, I believe, still in vogue. An improvement, I suppose, upon *goblin* or *orc*. I feel, however, that we are not so much here because you called me a *malignos* – it's good Pilipino, and besides, Ritchie and I use the expression all the time – but that we can no longer tolerate seeing your ugly face at my place of work."

"A place," I said, "which also happens to be my watering-hole of choice."

Her hand vanished into the folds of her cloak; reappeared. I saw, then, that she clutched the hilt of that length of Toledo steel for which I held an esteem that – barring she who held it aloft – had no parallel. It was my rapier, *Espiritu Sancto*. "Ritchie, I think you'll be needing this." She tossed the sword towards me. It wheeled through the air, lazily it seemed, as if to say Relax, take it easy, don't worry. I knew then that all would be well, that all manner of things would be well.

"But I have choice of weapons!" said the Tasmanian. On sighting my rapier – that blade Gala had had baptised in my stead in the hope that my own baptism might follow – I felt my hangover-induced clumsiness disappear. I dropped the *itak* and caught the sword by its spinning hilt. "I have choice of weapons!" he repeated. "It is the custom! You challenged *me*!" He would, of course, have heard of my reputation amongst the habitués of the barrio's *salle d'armes*; why else had he chosen to fight with the *itak*, a weapon that, in my classically trained hand, would be a handicap to my technique as much as an affront to my dignity?

"The *itak*," I said, kicking that crude implement contemptuously aside as I swung my own blade in a circle above my head, "the *itak* is so vulgar." I brought *Espir-*



*itu Sancto* down to the level of my waist; made a few passes at the vacant air. "It belongs," I continued, "in the hands of peasants and *banditos*. Not a creature such as myself. Custom, you say? You are right to remind me of custom. But when custom defies elegance, custom must go." The light teeming across the sea seemed muted, now. Concomitantly, the pain behind my eyes no longer had the power to distract, the feel of that finely balanced rapier – heirloom that had been in my family for six generations, but had been nameless until I had come to the Pilipinas – concentrating my attention on the task before me. "Yes, yes, custom must go, and so, gross antipodean, must *you*." I went into a crouch and, daintily, but with supreme confidence, began to edge towards him. As before, he retreated to the shoreline, though this time propelled by no toe punt to the stomach, but by an apprehension that had transformed his gloating face into a twitching mass of blubber. "Ah yesssss," I whispered, indulging myself in a little melodramatic sibilance, "you see this blue steel? You see its holy fire? Let me introduce you to *Espiritu Sancto*."

I was about to go into a running attack, or *fleche*, when the Tasmanian looked down at his feet and cried out.

A pair of hands had emerged from the wet sand and grasped him by the ankles.

I looked over my shoulder. "Gala!"

Her mouth was frozen in a rictus. Unable to speak, she seemed equally unable to move.

I turned my attention back to the Tasmanian. He was hacking at that pair of disembodied hands with his *itak* and, though he had managed to sever several anonymous fingers, had, in the process, inflicted deep wounds upon his own flesh. "Help me!" he cried, looking up. "Please, as one human to another – " And then, as his eyes glazed with panic, he stared down once again at the two bloody, alien appendages, that, despite by now being almost completely diced, still clung to him tenaciously. He put a hand to his heart; gasped; then let go of the *itak*. The beach had cratered about where he stood. And into that soft, yielding circumference he sank, pulled part way down until the oozy sand was level with the tops of his thighs. His gaze fell upon Gala. "I don't deserve this! I don't deserve to be taken by your filthy cousins! Oh damn you, help me! Don't let me die at the hands of the *malignos*!" And then with a soft sound of ingestion that melded with the sighing of the waves, the rest of him disappeared, the sand closing in over his head. Gala crossed herself.

"There must be a tunnel under there," I said, pointing to where my fellow duellist had been swallowed up. It had been an effort to keep my voice level.

"There, here, everywhere," said Gala, her eyes darting about the panorama of the beach. "Many tunnels, probably. Humans don't come here often. It would be a good place for my people to live, near enough to the barrio to steal food, but isolated enough to provide safety." It was true: Snake Island's notoriety as a venue for the settling of quarrels did not make it a popular destination. And where there were no humans, you might expect to sometimes encounter *malignos*. The peace treaty prohibited the arrogation of arable land and forbade

encroachments on centres of human population; wastelands and deserts, these days, were the only places Netherworlders dared surface when they tunnelled upward into the light and air. "We should leave, Ritchie." Gala turned away and walked towards the jetty.

I hesitated, looking around me, wondering where other *malignos* lurked; behind the rocks, perhaps, or in the thick vegetation that sprang from the cliff-face, or, more worryingly, directly beneath my feet. I scrambled after Gala, stooping to pick up my jacket as I proceeded, all the time casting glances about the beach, *Espiritu Sancto* held at the ready.

"I could have taken him," I said to Gala, "I hope you realize that. If it hadn't been for – " But I checked myself. *For one of your friends*, I was about to say. But Gala, who had betrayed her people, no longer had any friends; not in the Netherworld, at least. "I could have taken him," I repeated, lamely. As I trotted along, I brushed the sand from my clothes. Of late, I had been unhappy at the state of my wardrobe. With only rags left to me I would soon have to get my old army uniform out of mothballs, loathe as I was to have its glory soiled by everyday wear and tear.

Our *banca* was anchored where we had left it. The elderly sailor, his skin as dark and wrinkled as the shell of a burnt walnut, held out a hand and helped Gala into the little boat. I followed, clambering along the bamboo outrigger with such haste that I nearly slipped into the sea. The old man brought up the anchor, cast off, unfurled the sail, and then settled himself by the tiller. The sea was choppy, but we had a good wind – a typhoon, it was said, was closing on the archipelago from the Sea of Cathay – and the *banca* clipped towards the mainland at a rate that soon left Snake Island far behind.

Despite the morning's heat, Gala shivered. "Do you think they might have been coming for me, Ritchie? Do you think they just got that antipodean by mistake?"

Quickly, I shook my head. "No; of course not." But I was unsure. I looked back to the island. "Three years after the armistice, and it seems we still have cause to fear them. Ah, this is how it all began, hundreds of years ago: terrorist incursions, guerrilla raids, *camisados*."

"Followed by demands that *malignos* be given their share of the Earth's surface," said Gala. "Was that so unreasonable?"

"Unreasonable or not," I said, "it's difficult to negotiate with creatures that seem determined to fulfil your every nightmare. What will stop them?"

"Nothing will, Ritchie. They still dream of living like we do. Beneath the sun and the sky." The sea spray had covered us with a patina of brine. Gala pulled the cowl back over her head. "If my kind did not feel such a longing for the open air, then this *malignos* would never have been driven to turn her back on her own people and fight on the side of humanity. Then where would you be, little boy?"

"Where would *you* be," I countered, looking back at the little island we had recently left, now framed by a mountainous headland. Gala had been given little choice: Obey the Darkling Isle's directives, or else be returned to the depths.

"And yet," said Gala, "there are times when I can't help feeling that my freedom to walk beneath the sky is a curse. Humans hate me, even though I helped them win the war. I can't go back, but neither can I expect to be accepted here. I'm exiled from both worlds." I put my arm about her shoulder.

"When we have some money –"

"Oh Ritchie, how many times have I heard that before?" She leant her head against me, fingers slipping under my shirt and across my chest. I winced as she petulantly plucked a hair from its follicle. From a brassy young woman who knew too much of the world she had become suddenly childlike. Quietly, she began to cry. "Don't leave me, Ritchie," she said. "Promise you won't leave me."

"Of course I promise." I looked into her face; touched the ferroniere suspended about the forehead, its silver crucifix matching the metallic texture of her skin. She reminded me, when she wore that particular item of jewellery, of an illumination I had seen, a copy of that celebrated lost masterpiece of The Ancients, Leonardo's *La Belle Ferroniere*. Certainly, she was as beautiful as that belle, if twice as strange.

I passed my hand under the cowl, massaging that area of the scalp between the smooth, polished bone of her horns. I retracted, slipped the same hand under the folds of her cloak and stroked her long, white mane, its damp locks and strands plastered to the tiny plates that scaled her body. I caressed her knotty spine; felt her great, folded wings – bat's wings that had the aspect of steel beaten so thin it had become limpid – and, lower down, felt, too, the root of her tail, the arrowhead of which poked from under the cloak's hem and swished negligently against the boat's slim hull.

"When we have some money we'll get away from this place," I said. "You won't have to work in a bar any longer. You can open that little *carinderia* you always talk about."

"Ah, people will always make trouble for us."

"Then we'll make trouble for *them*," I said, smiling at her. "So much trouble that we'll be given some space of our own, our own island, yes, our own country."

"Our own world," she said, with a child's seriousness. "Yes, Ritchie, that would be nice."

We were in shallower water now. To either side of us protruded the masts, jib-booms and other identifying markers of half-sunken wrecks: junks, sampans, schooners and barquentines – all victims of a centuries-long conflict that had almost wiped humanity from the face of the Earth. I looked ahead. A ruined church – its steeple half blasted away – jutted above the low skyline of Barrio Barretto, the shacks and hovels lining the shore standing out in relief against the whitewashed tenements of the town proper. We would soon be home.

Quite suddenly, Gala's presence had begun to make me feel uncomfortable. The feel of her cool skin beneath the black silk mantle became unsettling; and then it became vile, the flesh seeming to crawl at contact with my hand, as if hordes of insects were engaged in furious copulation beneath the chain mail of the epidermis. She was *the woman I admired above all women, both inhuman and human*. Empty words, I thought, which neither came from the heart, nor had any hope of finding one. What was

wrong with me? But it was redundant to ask myself such a question. I knew too well what was wrong. The malaise was one I had contracted in the Darkling Isle. The prognosis? The prognosis was that I would, in time, find it impossible to touch another, or to be moved by their want. All I would be left with would be the ability to *curse*.

I broke free from her embrace. Hurt, she looked up at me. At such times as this, in the fever of affectlessness that, like malaria, attacks but in fits, I knew that I was a creature unsuited to company, that humanity and I would be better served by a tacit agreement that each should exclude the other. The war, doubtless, was much to blame; it was almost as if, in delving deep, and then deeper into the Earth to engage with the enemy, we had overreached ourselves and come upon, amongst the remains of those weird, buried artefacts of the ancient world, some terrible and still operative machine designed for the destruction of "the intimate" and, inadvertently, had turned it on.

The *banca* was nearing the shore. Let silence reign. Let vacancy triumph. Let me end my days staring at the blankest of walls. At all costs, I thought, keep that skyline with its hordes of chattering men, women and children away! But soon a boy was running across the sand to assist us in our disembarkation. Life had me in its maw again.

I pulled my half-hunter from my waistcoat pocket. I hoped my new client was not a stickler for punctiliousness.

It was nearly eight o'clock.



The balcony of my apartment overlooked a road that ran the length of Baloy Beach. The balcony did not exactly provide a "sea view" – a series of obstructions, such as tin roofs and a profuse, almost manic outgrowth of coconut trees that were entwined amongst the road's tall, wrought-iron oil lamps, obscured all but a sliver of the bay – but, as long as it was not raining (and that day, the rain had held off, though the skies were darkening by the hour), it was the place where I always conducted interviews with those who sought my services. Not because I expected them to be impressed with the ambience, but because the interior of my apartment was so threadbare as to suggest that here lived a PI for whom P stood less for *Private* than *Privation*.

I handed the boy a drink and sank back in my chair, slapping at my neck as I felt the tingle of a mosquito. (I had had a bad case of dengue only six months ago and had since developed something of a neurotic obsession with the antics of the dengue-carrying *Aedes aegypti*, that fickle mosquito which will only bite during the early hours of the day.) "Tell me about yourself," I said. "Tell me about your problem. And tell me what you want me to do."

But as the boy talked I found my attention drifting. I let my gaze travel across the rooftops. From the poverty of my vantage point, I spotted, in a corner of that sliver of blue which was all one could see of Subic Bay, the tiny mound that was Snake Island.



My lack of concentration mattered little, I knew; I had heard the boy's story from a dozen other clients, some of whom I had been able to help, some of whom I hadn't. His mouth opened and closed, the words buzzing about me like a swarm of insects. That drowsy music carried me to the borders of dreamland.

I was a child again. I lived in a place called Greenwich. Above the town, there was a hill I would climb, surrounded by parkland and river. From its top I could see all of London, and beyond its walled periphery, the hills. Out there, they said, were wastelands populated by shades and goblins. My father, finding me one night crying in my bed, took me in his arms.

"Goblins are not going to hurt you,"

he said. "They live underground, far, far away. Once, we traded with them.

They provided us with those fragments of the ancient world upon which our science is based. Without their help, our country's renaissance would have been still-born." And he told me that the war was a tragedy. But I should not cry, because goblins would never invade London. They terrorised us sometimes, yes; they crept from the sewers at night and thieved and murdered; but the army had the threat under control; goblins would never emerge from the Netherworld *en*

*masse*. And he kissed me goodnight.

My father held a junior position at the Naval College and, I felt, was sure to know about such things. But I would still see, in the shadows that swarmed about my bed, the faces of goblins smirking malevolently at me; still imagine that, at any minute, a pair of scaly hands would reach under my bedclothes and grab me by the legs. Those shadows were a presentiment of the intensification of the war, the invasion that, despite my father's reassurances, shortly followed.

A shouted exchange between the owner of the *sari-sari* store downstairs and a drunken customer snapped me out of my daydream, the afterimages of those smirking goblin-faces still before my eyes.

I sighed; I was no longer able to defer making a mental precis of the boy's case. Dredging up the details my

mind had managed to register while the thrust of my thoughts was elsewhere, I came up with this:

Fourteen years old, he too was from the Darkling Isle. At ten he had been orphaned and become the responsibility of the state, the army soon after pressing him into service as a tunnel rat. Whey-faced, malnourished and a little crookbacked, he was small for his age; at the age of ten he would have been capable of wriggling his way through passages which regular troops, such as myself, had had no hope of negotiating. He had been lucky to survive. I knew few who had. His name was

John Defoe. And the little *malignos* who had

rescued him when he had become lost

beneath ground, stranded in the

dark tunnels and caverns

beneath London, was now

in the easternmost part

of the Netherworld.

Or so he had come

to believe after

acquiring information from

teratoid

traitors who,

like Gala,

and indeed,

his own goblin girl, had

purchased the right to

live on the

surface of the

Earth by selling out their

own people.

Defoe's story

shared more than a

few elements with

my own. I had, like the

boy, once lain wounded in

the Netherworld; and like the

boy, I had been rescued by a

*malignos* recruited by the Darkling

Isle who, after tending to my wounds, had

dragged me to the surface. It was Gala, of

course, who had been that *malignos*; she who

had saved my life.

The boy's story had struck a chord.

But even if it had not, my impecuniousness would, of course, have compelled me to accept his fee, whatever the hazards.

"When I was underground..." He put his head in his hands, unable, for the moment, to continue. I had, it seemed, brought my concentration to bear upon the boy's words at the very moment he had been lost for them.

"A *malignos*, in such times as these in which we live," I said, in an effort to loosen his tongue, "is often the only prospect we have of intimacy. Of being touched. It is ironic, is it not, that so many ex-soldiers should discover, in their former enemies, a panacea for their ills?"

Like other damaged humans who had knocked on my



door he was of the world but not in it. He existed in a windswept limbo, blown hither and thither and unable to connect with that parallel universe of laughter and tears that lay just beyond his reach. His hopes, now, lay in turning from the human altogether and embracing the alien.

"I suppose," said the boy, "that my quest must seem, to most people, a somewhat odd one. An immoral one, perhaps. When I heard about your own exogamy –"

"My *exogamy*?"

"Your liaison with a teratoid."

"I'm not married," I said, wondering at his boldness, but indifferent to what he thought of me. "Gala Diaz Garcita is my mistress." The boy nodded, seemingly a little embarrassed, even though he had already outlined his own circumstances. "Though some day..." But what, I thought, am I doing explaining myself to this pup? Why on earth should I be making excuses?

"Marriage to a *malignos*, of course, carries certain legal penalties. Even out here, you would still, I believe, lose your human status?" I nodded. "Yes, yes. It is not a thing to be taken lightly. You and me, Dr Pike: we are fellow travellers. It is on that basis that I decided that you were the man best suited to lend me assistance."

"I've taken up cases like yours before," I said. "I'm glad to have won your confidence. But tell me, where did you first learn of my abilities, here or –"

"Back home," interrupted the boy, "in the Darkling Isle."

"Home?" I waved my hand to encompass the scene beneath the balcony. Gigs rattled along the dirt road; pedlars of fish and seaweed, their eyes momentarily brightening as they misinterpreted my gesture as one portending a sale, gritted their teeth and passed by; and raggedy urchins, sighting the unwashed European leaning over the stone balustrade, his lips compressed with pernicky distaste, giggled. "This is home now," I said. "But am I still spoken of in London?"

"Indeed, your exploits are spoken of all the time. You are known as a great goblin killer. Of course, you are also known as –"

"Go on," I said. *A great goblin fucker*, he might have concluded, if he'd had the courage; yes, I knew what people said back "home" when they spoke of Richard Pike, the noted miscegenist. But the boy refrained.

"Suffice to say, you are notorious. Yet you still have friends."

"And enemies too, doubtless." The boy knotted his brow and shifted in his seat. "Have you been to the Pilipinas before?" I continued, eager to get back to the business at hand.

"No," he said. "I've never been outside Europa."

"Then you have done the right thing in calling on me before you proceed to do anything else. The archipelago is a dangerous place." The boy sipped at his drink, his eyelids bruised with sleeplessness. It had grown hot. Sluggishly, the boy stared up at me, a glint from the ice-blue depths of his regard seeming to echo something in my own soul, something bright, infinitely self-serving and quite, quite dead.

"Dr Pike, I can well believe it is a dangerous place."



I walked through the barrio. Lamps cast their lurid light over shop-houses and cheap hotels, leaving the whiff of whale oil in the air. Shirtless young men gathered about *carinderias* and *sari-saris* drinking *tapuy*. And the passing gigs sprayed me with muddy water whenever they rumbled over a pothole. The palms swayed in the gathering wind and a rain, heavier than the one that had fallen that afternoon, beat upon the corrugated iron of the rooftops, filling my ears with susurrant clamour.

There were a handful of pretty women on the streets that evening. Human women. Women of quality. And for a time, I found myself following this one or that, forgetting the downpour in contemplation of a trim waist or well-turned fundament. The sheath dresses common to the archipelago accentuated those aspects of female anatomy wonderfully. But I think the women, as is often the case, must have felt my eyes upon them, for sometimes an amber-skinned, sloe-eyed visage would peek from beneath a painted parasol to look backward with agitation, or disdain. Then I entered a part of the barrio where such women would never be so audacious as to set foot.

I pulled my cloak about me, holding the cowl in place with my hand. "Pssst!" called a voice from a doorway. "Why so much make-up, *Ingles*? You not in the Darkling Isle now. Come, *amigo*, show some respect." I didn't usually respond to these unimaginative insults. I was well-known about town, and suffered the disrespect of the locals with that measure of good humour and detachment that is expected of a foreigner. But the continuous anxiety I felt, of late, over the emptiness of my purse, had frayed my nerves and primed my temper. It was only after I had swept back my cloak and reached for my sword that I had remembered that I was unarmed; that, here, in the barrio, there was an ordinance that forbade the bearing of edged weapons in public; an ordinance that it would be foolish to contravene. The iron fist of the law came down more heavily on foreigners than locals.

Cursing, and wishing that *Espiritu Sancto* was buckled to my side and not languishing in my apartment, I walked on, with the muted laughter of my tormentor in my ears.

When I had turned a corner, and was sure I could not be observed, I walked up to a shop-house window. The shop was unmarked, but lay between Regina's Lovely Place and Edward's Hair Wax Boutique. From what I could establish from the wares displayed behind its murky panes, it seemed to belong to a ship-chandler. I pulled back my cowl and examined my reflection.

My mascara was tasteful, I thought (it had been expensive), and my eye shadow neither excessive nor otherwise contrary to the standards of my, or indeed any other of my countrymen's toilette. These locals: they did not understand that, for a gentleman and officer of the Darkling Isle, appearance is of much importance as martial accomplishment. Unwilling to pass by a reflective surface without giving other aspects of my appearance a cursory inspection, I studied myself more closely.



A few grey hairs, a somewhat lean but by no means unattractive face – not bad, I thought, for a man of mid-dling years. I turned away as my gaze fell upon my attire. The raggedy suit I had been condemned to wear was beneath contempt. I refused to award it notice.

I walked on. Five years I had lived in this town – five years of poking about in other people's sordid lives – and more often than not with little more than a pocketful of pesos to my name. The cases I investigated brought in enough to pay the rent, but if it had not been for the money Gala made from taking various lowlifes into her bed, I would have starved long ago.

I stopped outside the bar where Gala worked and where I did my drinking: Nightriders. I entered, passing through a haze of dragonflies that flitted about the porch. Inside was a vestibule, its black walls and ceiling illuminated by a single taper.

"Good evening, Dr Pike," said the guard in the wheelchair. A long dagger lay across his polio-wasted thighs.

"Good evening, Bong," I said, raising my voice so that I might be heard above the music emanating from beyond the connecting door.

"No loud man to annoy you tonight I think, Dr Pike?"

"I think not, Bong," I said, treating him to a thin, ironic smile. "Such a pity. I do so enjoy stentorian company. But tonight, I am fated to suffer only loud music, it seems."

"Ah, I think you throw the Tasmanian a good *despedida*. Yes?" Indeed, I thought. His going-away party on Snake Island had gone well. Bong returned my smile, his lips curling themselves into an obsequious imitation of my own. "First time I meet you I think you are a stuck-up man, Dr Pike. Very stuck-up. I think, maybe, that you are a *faggot*. But you have a way about you, I think. A way I like. That Tasmanian. It was he who was the queer. He who was the Benny boy, I think. Not you."

"You're too kind, Bong," I said. "Thank you for having faith in my machismo."

He reached up and opened the door and I proceeded into the bar's interior, a narrow, low-ceilinged expanse decorated with great swathes of primary colours. The candelabra appointed to each table cast dancing shadows upon the walls.

The four-piece band – harpsichord, guitar, drums and gamelan – was knocking out a *kundiman* with some degree of abandon. The tune had an Iberian flavour, and a girl, somewhat drunk, I suspected, spun about the area immediately before the little stage. A thigh flashed from the hip-high slit in her skirt, and her hands wove sinuous patterns as she worked her castanets. My left eardrum, perforated during the war, made its usual complaint, its pain receptors fired up by the gamelan's chimes and peals, so like tinnitus; the castanets' staccato, so like stiletto-heeled shoes on marble tiles.

The shadows danced; the girl danced. But they were not alone. Down the centre of the bar, on a long catwalk, three forms strutted and jiggled, their nakedness partly obscured by a gauzy curtain of smoke. Though the blue-grey haze blurred the differences between human and inhuman, one of those forms was certainly

a *malignos*. As I made my way amongst the half-empty tables I could swear that the creature smiled at me. I looked up. Her flesh was configured in a manner that, as well as setting her apart from humanity, also set her apart from Gala. *Malignos*, of course, have racial characteristics far more marked, more various, than humans. The flirtatious creature who shimmied before me had Gala's horns, but she was green as a lizard, possessed stunted, non-functional wings, and had an extra set of eyes where her nipples should have been. I gave a desultory salute and passed her by; I had other matters to attend to.

I hissed and caught the attention of a waitress. She was human, and had only one set of eyes, but they were eyes that distinguished her from humanity as effectively as those of the *malignos* that danced nearby. The bleak, incurious way in which they surveyed me immediately identified her as one who had been simplified. How, I wondered, had she obtained permission to enter the confines of the barrio? The simplified were cheap labour; perhaps the bar's owner had thrown some pesos in the way of the *barangay*, or otherwise pulled strings.

"Is Gala out back?" I asked. Her face grew pained, as if the electrical activity I had demanded of her brain was too much for her to bear; then, summoning all her strength, she gave a curt affirmation and resumed her work, placing a jug of beer on a table where a group of local men sang along with the band, unconscious of anything but the music, their drunk and, not too far off on the horizon of their inebriated perception, the joyful possibility of violence. I had had enough fighting for one day; I gave them a wide berth and walked through an open doorway leading onto a patio overlooking the beach.

To one side of the patio stood a cage which housed two forlorn monkeys. A small girl teased them, jabbing at their ulcerated hides with a pointed stick. The child looked up as I approached and then pursed her lips towards a party of bar girls who congregated about a table at the patio's farther end, smoking and playing cards. Amongst their number I spotted Gala.

I hallooed, catching her attention. She put out her pipe and strolled towards me. "Let's go down to the sea," I said. Gala at once understood the need for private conference and followed me across the sand until we stood near the edge of the surf. There, we sheltered under one of several beach umbrellas that, despite the incoming typhoon, the staff had failed to stow away. The gaily painted canopy shuddered with each gust of wind, its bamboo upright moaning and creaking.

Gala drew her peignoir tightly about her body. Though the night was hot, each drop of rain pricked the skin with the severity of a miniature piece of hail. Looking up at the dark sky, avoiding those eyes that were darker, more mysterious, than any stormy, cloud-covered firmament shot through with moonlight, I briefed her on the nature of our new assignment.

"Familiar story," I concluded. "Soldier enters into a liaison with a *malignos*, loses her, seeks her again. The boy seems to think she's in this part of the world, though, by all accounts, she originally lived beneath Europa. She's a traitor, like you. But unlike you, she

couldn't take the pressures of living with a human. Anyway, seems she left him and travelled East. And now he wants us to help him track her down. Curious thing is, he says she's in the Netherworld."

"In the Netherworld?" said Gala, with some surprise. "Why should she have gone back to the Netherworld? If she's a traitor, she risks losing her life."

"Perhaps the Netherworld is not so eager to wreak revenge as you sometimes make out, my sweet."

"No, Ritchie. The Netherworld does not forgive. I can only suppose that, coming from Europa, she does not expect to be recognized out here."

"The boy said as much."

"All the same –"

"So we take the assignment?"

"We've certainly done similar things before," she said. "But I'm never happy going underground. You know that."

"The boy insists," I said. "And he's already given me a retainer. Enough pesos for us to live in the style we richly deserve." I shrugged, conceding the hyperbole. "Well, enough at least for us to be able to eat out for a couple of weeks."

"Enough pesos for you to spend on books, on canvases, on clothes or on that stuff you plaster your face with." I looked away, a little put out, my attention given to the bar girls on the patio, and in particular a young human called Esperanza who had the plumpest lips you could possibly imagine; lips that were always set in a becoming pout.

"Our client," I said, distractedly, "won't be happy if we try to fob him off with anything less than a *full-blooded* investigation. If the trail goes underground – and according to the boy's information, it does – then so must we." Gala turned about and stared at the rows of *banca* anchored in the shallows. The sea was more turbulent than this morning, and though the band, at this distance, no longer had the power to inflict the kind of aural discomfort it had made me suffer inside the bar, the crashing of the waves made it necessary for me to again raise my voice. "Remember our plans, honeyco: the little restaurant, a home, a *real* home we can call our own, and –" I checked my tongue. My knowledge of what constituted domestic bliss was severely limited, and I did not know if, in attempting to seduce her in this manner, I might simply sound like a crooked horse dealer checking off a list of tarded up old nags.

"I've always stood by you, Ritchie. And what have I got? Nothing. I just get kicked in the teeth. All your life you've set yourself up on a pedestal for your own admiration. I'm sick of it. Sick of your vain, selfish concerns, your dilettantism and your, your" – she turned; caught me looking at the girl on the patio – "your philandering!" I laughed; put my hands up, as if to ward off a blow I knew would never come. The laugh stuck in my throat like a chicken bone. I did not care for Gala when she was in this mood. She frightened me. "And just look at this suit!" she said, reaching out and taking the lapel between her long fingers. "How many men did I have to sleep with to buy this? It's barely two months old and already you're saying you need another!" Gala, tonight, was less a revelation – we had had these little set-tos before – than a reminder of my inadequacy. And I could

do without such memoranda. "That Tasmanian was right. You're a charlatan! A popinjay!"

I removed her hand from my jacket and tried to compose myself. "Gala, I know I haven't given you much –"

"*Walanghiya!* You haven't given me *anything*." Her eyes had begun to well with tears. Damnation, I thought, let me be spared this. Let me be spared the tears of a child-woman.

"If we just do this one job, then I promise you, I promise you –" But now the tears were in full flood. Her head was bowed and she gulped at the air, her body shaking. Nervously, I looked about. But seeing we were unobserved I took Gala in my arms and held her, swaying back and forth as if I might be rocking a baby.

"Oh please, honeyco," she said, as she choked and shuddered. "Please look after me. You said we would get married."

"Just this one more time," I said. "And then I'll make everything right. I promise."

"You know what would happen to me if I was captured?" I knew. But there was little hope of navigating the Netherworld without Gala's help. Was my conscience perturbed, at times such as these, by the fact that I made money only because a young woman, as much an outsider to the world of her birth as her adopted world, was willing to endanger herself for my sake? It was; I knew I was a sham, nothing more than a ponce, living, not just off immoral earnings, but off money tainted by the callous disregard in which I used Gala in my investigative work. She should have been better served; better served by one such as myself, a man who clung to her because she was the only person in the world who had ever moved him, who had ever stirred him from his state of chronic affectlessness.

"No harm is going to come to you," I said, wishing I could summon up a degree of shame. "I won't let it."

"Do you promise, Ritchie? Do you really promise?"

"I promise." I held her more tightly.

"I sometimes wish we'd never left the Darkling Isle," she said.

"But we had no choice," I said. "No human army will tolerate a soldier consorting with a *malignos*, even if she's gone over. Besides, it was you who suggested we come here." Gala had been born in the archipelago, in the worm-eaten innards of the Zambales mountains. When she had been a child she had joined her mother on an expedition to the surface world to look for food. The light and air had had a bewitching effect, and, while her mother looked the other way, she had wandered off, chasing sunbeams and butterflies. Lost, she wandered many days, and at last came to Barrio Barretto. Friendless, she had lived beneath the city walls. The church had discovered her; taken her into its fold; and she was given a new name, a new life. My own government, at that time, was looking for teratoid children whom they could turn and train to serve in their armies. And Gala – discovered in a Carmelite priory and kidnapped at gun point – was one of many such children transported to the Darkling Isle. There, she had been trained to infiltrate the depths beneath London and spy on her brothers and sisters. The Darkling Isle desperately needed



intelligence of what transpired in the deepest parts of the Netherworld. Tunnel rats like John Defoe could never survive such descents. For such work, the army needed the talents of a *malignos*.

"It was you," I continued, "who thought we would have more of a chance of prospering here, in a country familiar to you as a child." But I was being somewhat disingenuous. I had come to hate the English. Hate them as much as they had hated me. Even now, with a treaty between the Netherworld and Earth-Above, there was, in the Darkling Isle, still too much hostility towards *malignos* for Gala and I to be able to set foot in that country without incurring the general population's ire. Five years ago, after I had been stripped of my commission, and while the war still raged, I had forced Gala's hand, eager to travel as far from the Darkling Isle's shores as possible. It was only out here, in the East, amongst the outcasts and vagabonds of the Pilipinas, that we were part accepted, and could live without fear of being stoned by street urchins, or having our house set fire by a screaming mob.

"You could have been discreet," she said. Gala the little girl went into hiding, and Gala, the tough, street-wise survivor, became predominant. But still she held on to me. "You needn't have been cashiered if you'd been more careful. But you just had to show off. You had to tell everyone how unafraid you were. You had to tell everyone that you slept with a *malignos*. You always show off. You're so *selfish*."

"Well, I'm *sorry*," I said, like an automaton. I avoided her eyes; looked up at the night sky. I felt as if I had lived my life on one of those hard stars that peeped through chinks in the clouds, so far away and surrounded by such cold immensities. Gala continued to talk, but as earlier, when I had interviewed John Defoe, I saw her mouth open and close but heard nothing but a distant buzz. My mind was elsewhere. Like an astral body, it had travelled many miles, and glided above the streets and towers of London, winding through a dark cityscape decimated by three centuries of war; a city, a country, that had borne the brunt of the last, great invasion from the Earth's depths, whose soul had been perverted and deadened by terror. *Sorry*. The word echoed through the darkness of my soul; echoed through the emptiness of my existence, as if I were the Darkling Isle itself, ruined, bereft of any emotion that might qualify me as human, as dark as the depths which, over the centuries of turmoil, it had come to mirror, with only the reverberation of that one word to remind me that once here had been life: *sorry*.



After I had told her that I would venture into the Netherworld alone, if need be, I knew Gala would accede to my demands. Call it emotional blackmail, if you will, but in my work as a private investigator I have found the need to manipulate people, even those closest to me, to often be of paramount importance. I felt uneasy of course; I think even some of that rare stuff called

"shame" might have successfully found its way through the dead stuff that armoured my conscience. But I really did intend that, with the money we should make from this case, Gala and I should make a new start.

We lay in bed. Shadows raced across the walls and ceiling. The typhoon had arrived, and the rattle of roofs, the whiplash of wind-lashed trees, mixed with the commotion of the sea.

I was tired, but I could not sleep. The flotsam of my life's shipwreck surrounded me. A broken easel, upon which stood a half-finished study of Gala, a study that was a bathetic attempt to combine Turner's lighting effects with Leonardo's anatomic precision, testified to my failed ambitions as an artist. A row of mildewed books on their rickety shelf reminded me of what I might have been if, instead of enlisting, I had pursued my academic career as a professor of history. My old uniform hung from a peg on the door, its epaulettes and brass buttons reflecting the ghastly light that streamed in from the bedroom window; what a reminder *that* was of failure, disgrace and exile.

My gaze, then, fell upon Gala's dolls'-house. The tiny lead figurines that Gala liked to collect, sculpted into semblances of human women from around the world, stood and lay in the cheap, cardboard habitation I had bought for her last Easter. How was it that such a hardened character as Gala could find comfort in those children's toys?

Gala was asleep, but dreamily, unconsciously, still ran her hands through the hairs of my chest, sometimes idly plucking at them. Pinned to the wall opposite, and livid in the glare from outside, was a picture of the Virgin; beside it, a few miniatures of Gala, which I had sketched inside Nightriders. And on the night table beside me was the little king of heaven: a doll in velvet robes, carrying an orb and sceptre and wearing a tin crown: *El Nino Santo*. I turned my face to him, and, in my worthlessness, whispered *Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis*. Despite not being able to believe in either your grace or your person, out of the depths into which I will soon plunge, I thought, O Lord, let my cry come unto thee.



The next day our party hired horses and rode through the barrio until we came to the wall beyond which lay the wastelands of central Luzon. As we passed through the gates the boy, Defoe, gave a start of surprise.

"The simplified – you have them here too!" Camped along the length of the wall were men, women and children who all had the dull-eyed look of the waitress I had encountered the night before. Some lay insensate, bivouacked under scraps of canvas; others, grinning, laughing, shrieking, scavenged for food amongst steaming refuse, or else clawed, thirst-crazed, at the oozy soil in the hope of discovering a cracked water pipe. Amidst the laughter, the shrieks, a general cry of *uh-uh-uh* preponderated and rose into the insect-filled air. These wretches represented those amongst the rural popula-

tion who had been coerced into eating the root that, in the local dialect is called *mangagawa*, and which in the Darkling Isle we familiarly call *Tom o' Bedlam* or *Zany's Delight*. The narcotic contained in that root induces a persistent mental state that allows human beings to bear their poverty without rancour. And, more to the point, without causing civil unrest.

"In the Pilipinas, those simplified are called the *masa*," I said. I regarded them with an equal measure of pity and contempt, but more than anything, with relief. On leave in London, I had been denied my sword. (There was an ordinance in the Darkling Isle, just as there was in the barrio, that forbade the bearing of arms in public places.) And without my sword, certain kinds of urban scum who had *resisted* simplification had often made life uncomfortable for me.

I would not be denied a sword here; no, not now I had passed beyond the city limits. In London, going unarmed in the dark lanes and alleys by the Thames had made me a resourceful street fighter. But fighting with fist and foot was not my *metier*. I was a swordsman, not a brawler.

I detached *Espiritu Sancto* from where it hung beside my saddle and unwound the oiled rag that swaddled it. Then I sheathed my beloved blade in the scabbard that I had buckled on in preparation for this moment when we would again be together.

Defoe geed his horse so that it came level with my own, all the time surveying the *masa* with stoic distaste. It was an attitude typical of my countrymen, who employed beast-people as labourers, even, sometimes, as servants, but who, nevertheless, could not rid themselves of a deep-seated disgust for the beings they themselves had created; yet I saw, to my surprise, that the boy's eyes also glinted with fear. Few of the Darkling Isle actually feared the simplified.

Defoe noticed that I was watching him and, after clearing his throat, seemed to feel bound to offer an explanation.

"After I lost my parents, the authorities tried to coerce me into undergoing simplification," he said. "Unless, that is, I chose to become a tunnel rat. They said they would –" He closed his eyes. "There is a passage from the writings of The Ancients," he continued, rather more quickly, as if eager to have all said and done. "It perfectly describes the contempt in which I would have been held if I had consumed *Tom o' Bedlam*." He took a deep breath and then began to recite. "*He possessed no power of thought, no depth of feeling, no troublesome sensibilities: nothing, in short, but a few commonplace instincts, which aided by the cheerful temper that grew inevitably out of his physical well-being, did duty very respectably, and to general acceptance, in lieu of a heart...*" He paused; studied me, to see if I had understood. And then he again spoke. "After simplification, there is barely enough intellect left to prevent a man from walking on all fours. And that, Dr Pike, is why I shudder to look upon these human cattle. But for lady luck, there go I."

"The Ancients," I mused, "they seemed to have understood the price of losing one's humanity. But we..."

We passed a roadside shrine. On a plinth, a statue of

the Virgin stood, garlanded with pale *sampaguitas*. Gala crossed herself as we continued on our way.

"Are you Christians?" asked Defoe, a note of embarrassment informing his query.

"She is," I said, nodding towards Gala. We rode parallel to each other now, with me in the middle. "Does that surprise you?"

"I suppose it shouldn't," he said, directing his voice across my steed. "You were born in these parts, were you not *Senorita*? Christianity is in your blood. Besides, when the transcendental is lost, and in time of war, people turn to all manner of things for comfort, no matter how outlandish."

"Outlandish?" said Gala.

"Christianity is a dead religion. It is forgotten," said the boy.

"Not out here," I said. "Here, in the archipelago, it has never been forgotten."

"But I would never have thought," he said, still talking across me, "that a woman from your background –" But I answered before Gala could reply.

"If she embraces old superstition, Defoe, it is because the new superstitions that have currency in our world, superstitions that inhibit and finally destroy our sense of empathy, will lead us all to destruction." Gala frowned. She did not seem to like the equation of her faith with superstition. Neither, perhaps, did I. But I was too damaged by war to be able to lift my face to heaven and put all my hope in the love everlasting. The only thing I feared more than the mummery of my own existence was the possibility that God also was an ostentatious fake.

"Dr Pike," she said, "entertains the notion that there is an essential grace to his being, a grace that has to do with what he would call his gentlemanly virtues. That is what he believes in. That is *his* faith. But one day he will have his worthless life transformed by *true* grace. That day, I fear, is some way off. So far I have only succeeded in converting his sword."

"My sword flourishes under its new dispensation," I said with a dry laugh, "though whether I would likewise thrive, of course, remains part of the divine mystery."

"The only mystery," said Gala, "is whether you, my dear, have more of a soul than your rapier."

The boy averted his gaze from Gala and looked straight ahead, as if trying to descry some end to the dusty road. "It is difficult for any of us who come from the Darkling Isle to know whether or not we have souls," he said.

"Indeed," said I. "Our religion is nihilism. The only thing left to my countrymen after three centuries of war is the ability to *curse*. It is not a philosophy to live by." But I still cursed those who had precipitated our exile. And cursed much else besides.

We rode on in silence. By the wayside, nipa huts sheltered those amongst the *masa* who, despite the invidious effects of the drug that had curdled their brains, had mastered the art of constructing crude, bamboo dwellings. We passed, then, into the uninhabited wastelands.

The muddy fields that surrounded us had once been rice paddies. And the ghostly remnants of the villages that we passed through had once sounded with the prat-



tle of peasants and the lowing of carabao. But the incursions from the Netherworld had, over time, had the effect of depopulating the countryside. Those that could afford to had withdrawn within the walls of Barrio Barretto; those that could not had been co-opted into what, by the closing stages of the war, had become a planet-wide system of cretinization of the poor and dispossessed. Only birds and *banditos* now populated this place, the birds occasionally landing to perch upon the exposed ribs of those of the *masa* who had wandered into the wastelands and died, the *banditos*, thankfully, nowhere to be seen. I flexed my sword hand, apprehensive of a chance encounter.

An hour into our journey we were following the road as it serpentine up the Zambales mountains. The going was rocky, and our horses often stumbled, the ascent made more difficult by the blinding light of the overhead sun. Yesterday's storm had blown itself out, and the sun, with no cloud cover today to mollify its assault, belaboured our heads with its ultraviolet blows. Soon, my brain began to reel. I pulled my sombrero down and hunched over my saddle in a futile effort to minimize the effects of the grilling. But the heat was relentless. It was with considerable relief when, after attaining a point where we had a clear view of Mt Pinatubo, Gala signalled for us to halt.

We all dismounted and withdrew to the shade of the vegetation that swarmed up the nearby escarpment. Immediately below lay the lahar field that had been created during Pinatubo's most recent bout of activity.

"It's safe to descend here?" asked Defoe. "We won't be scalded?" I looked down, surveying the lahar, that grey porridge of ash and mud desolate but for sprigs of hardy greenery.

"There is a fumarole over there," said Gala, pointing across the tangle of vegetation to where the lahar was pockmarked with vents. "It's one that no longer emits gases. It will allow us to descend without threat of being poisoned or burnt."

"Trust her," I said to the boy. "She lived here –"

"Beneath here," Gala corrected.

"Beneath here, when she was a child."

"The purpose of our expedition," said Gala, anxious that Defoe understand that she was unprepared to take unnecessary risks, "is to reconnoitre the area directly beneath us and then resurface so that we may draw up a plan of action."

"I'm sure we'll run into some of Gala's contacts down there who'll give us leads on where to find your friend," I said, as anxious as Gala was, but only to keep my client happy.

We tethered our horses beneath the shade of a tree and gave them some feed. Then, after we had all strapped on our backpacks, Gala led us down an obscure path through the escarpment's undergrowth. It was a steep descent, and my feet slipped several times on grass still wet from last night's rain. The trail wound through a small, deserted village. A few dogs snarled and snapped at our ankles as we passed. A little way past the village a carabao, startled from its grazing by the sudden appearance of humans where, these days, few humans roamed, jumped into the air, its massive bulk incongruously gym-

nastic. I kept my hand on the pommel of my rapier, anxious about what the next turn in the trail might reveal.

After descending, perhaps, half a kilometre, we emerged from beneath the jungle canopy to find ourselves at the edge of the lahar. Without hesitation, Gala proceeded onward, confidently walking across the moonscape until she came to a vent that lay within the shadow cast by Pinatubo.

The boy and I caught Gala up; unburdened ourselves of our backpacks; took from each pack ropes, lamps and other paraphernalia, and lay out on the ground all that we would most immediately need, but no more. Once underground, we would be travelling light.

"Do you think I might actually find her *today*?" said Defoe. Gala and I were using chocks to secure three lengths of rope in the rocky ground at the fumarole's lip. About us, all was desert, a grey surface dotted with lapilli. A slight breeze carried little clouds of dust across its bald plain.

"I doubt it," said Gala. "Today, we're just going to find out how things might have changed down there. It's been nearly a year since Dr Pike and I ventured into the depths. But, as he has stated, I still have a few contacts below. If possible, I'll talk to them to see if we can glean any information. And then we must resurface. It is dangerous enough for humans down there, but for a *malignos*, such as myself, who has betrayed her own people, it is especially dangerous. I have not, and can never be forgiven."

Gala took off her cloak and let it fall upon the ground. In the barrio, she seldom wore more than that cloak; and despite the cold, it had been the same in London. Like all *malignos*, she was happier when naked. Today, only her argent scales would separate her from the rocks; rocks with which she had been too long denied voluptuous communion. For despite her craving for sun and air, she could not, so near her former, childhood home, deny the dark, atavistic call of her blood, the generations before her for whom shadows and slime were the stuff of life.

Her tail curled, its fluke-like tip snaking about her thigh. Her wings extended; beat at the air, the veined silver of their membranes scintillating in the sunlight. But the fumarole was too narrow for her to descend by way of flight. With a sound like rice paper scrunched within a fist, the wings folded themselves, cruciform, across her back, the pinions curling about her ankles.

She picked up a rope; dropped over the side; vanished. Tossing my sombrero onto the ground, I too grasped a rope and, with more caution, but no less determinedly, followed.

My rope went taut; I kicked out as my feet met the rock wall; and then I began to abseil. Below, Gala had already reached the ledge which was our first objective. Soon, I had joined her, Defoe only seconds behind. The ledge was as it had been one year previously. There was even an old, rotted length of hemp beneath our feet, where we had discarded a rope from our previous expedition; and most importantly, the adit remained free of hindrance, allowing us access to the Netherworld.

I detached an oil lamp from my belt, lit it, and handed it to Gala. She gestured towards the adit. And then,

walking in a slight crouch, she merged with the shadows, the dark opening in the rock face enveloping her, so that only the flicker of the lamp could be descried.

"We're fortunate," said Defoe, his eyes trained upon that naked flame, "that there's no firedamp."

"Don't worry about that," I said. "Gala and I know this tunnel." But I wondered then, not only at the confidence but at the prescience of his statement. It was almost as if he had been here before. "Come," I continued. "You'll see." I took him by the arm and followed the tongue of flame as it wove through the darkness.

We had walked perhaps no more than fifty metres when, turning a sharp bend, we were confronted by a finely chiselled arch which opened onto a stairway. Graffiti had been scored into the soft stone of the arch's voussoirs: indecipherable characters that I yet recognized as constituting the alphabet of the *malignos*. Gala snuffed out the lamp and handed it back to me. I re-secured it to my belt. The lamp was superfluous here, for the stairway was illuminated by a faint blue light. It emanated from the bioluminescent fungi that the *malignos* habitually planted in the veins of rock that they had hewn.

The extreme gradient of the stairway meant that, as soon as we had put foot upon its timeworn steps, both myself and the boy tottered, then windmilled our arms in an instinctive bid to correct a headlong fall. Gala suffered no such problems of adjustment. This, for her, was a homecoming, if an unwelcome one. She reached out and steadied me. The vertigo passed.

"Ah," said Defoe, gazing about him, "if only life could have been so simple during the war. Many's the time I've had to crawl miles through tunnels and passages scarcely big enough to admit a greased piglet before I'd stumble upon anything like this."

"The stairway is seldom used," said Gala. "This small part of the Netherworld is abandoned. But we must go quietly. Sound conducts through the rock and our approach may be picked up several kilometres away." Framed portraits hung from the rock wall on either side of us. Composed in what seemed a limited palette of variously tinted blue, these gloomy paintings depicted *malignos* who had exercised some authority in the Netherworld in a bygone age. They looked at us askance, or else brazenly met our eyes as I took my first tentative steps down the stairs.

Gala led the way, the silvery scales of her lithe body coruscating like sequins, each one of which captured the shaft's pale blue luminosity, so that we seemed to be descending through a coral sea, Gala a fantastic sea creature, and we two humans clumsy hunters of the deep, doomed never to add her to our catch. The violence of the shaft's gradient, as Gala had explained to me on a previous occasion, was due to the fact that, long ago, when travelling between the depths and the surface, *malignos* more often than not chose to fly, except, that is, in circumstances when they might be escorting human traders, for which such stairways as the one we negotiated had been designed. The accommodation and comfort of humans had, it seemed, evaded the designers' thoughts, though not, perhaps, the potential for their humiliation.

My legs began to ache; we seemed to have descended hundreds of metres. And still we lurched downward, striding, tripping, almost falling into endless space. The blueness of the light intensified in exponential relation to our descent, though without hampering our vision. At last the staircase bottomed out, and Defoe and I were able to rendezvous with our guide. It was a monochromatic world we found ourselves in, but one with many shades, cyanic, azure, cerulean, sapphire and cobalt. I knew, from past experience, that it would take several days before my brain rearranged those shades into approximations of other colours. We planned, on this trip, to be underground no more than a few hours. I would have to accept that a variegated spectrum would be denied me.

We stood in what might have been an antechamber, or lobby, of a country house in the Darkling Isle. The area formed a semicircle before a door, the lintel of which supported a bust of what I recognized to be the old Roman god, Pluto. Small pieces of furniture hugged the antechamber's contours: a card table, an *escritoire*, a few high-backed chairs. Gala strode across the checkerboard floor, her scales rustling like voile, organza, mousseline-de-soie, or any of the other fabrics she disdained to wear. Apart from the beat of my own heart, that swishing, alluring music was the only sound to break the silence. "Come," she said, looking at Defoe. "We're at the outskirts of an old Netherworld city. The one my people call Aeta. Beyond the door is a terminus where many tunnels and passages converge. In some of those forsaken tunnels live discontents and criminals, those amongst my people who have been condemned to live apart. It is they who I hope may give us the information we seek."

"You trust such creatures?" said Defoe.

"Not entirely. But they have a proud tradition of exchanging gossip for hard cash. You have money with you, of course?"

"Gold," he said. "I believe that will be acceptable." He flushed, and added, with a little bitterness, "The one you Christians call Judas certainly found it so."

"Indeed he did. The *malignos*, hereabouts, will also find it acceptable, I assure you."

Gala opened the door and we passed through into an immense cavern. Though it was something I had been ready for, the sight of those glossy walls curving towards a ceiling lost to a fathomless dark again precipitated the vertigo I had suffered when descending the staircase. As on the stairs, and in the antechamber outside, the illumination here was blue; but unlike outside, the light in the cavern emanated, not from fungi, but from petrified vegetation lodged in the rock face's cracks and fissures. Seething with luminescent micro-organisms, those dead flowers and plants glowed with a cold intensity, allowing me to see at once that we were not alone.



Above us, on a gallery that ran about the cavern's circumference where the blue light gave ground to the



darkness that obscured the vault, was a company of *malignos*. Hundreds of forms, sometimes misshapen, sometimes beautiful, stared down at us, their eyes sparkling like stars against the backdrop of an ultramarine night. Their silence was infectious, neither Gala nor I able to do more than look at each other with a wild surmise. How long we stood motionless, each consumed with the aspect of the other's face, I do not know, but when I looked about for Defoe, he was gone. And then, breaking that suffocating stillness, came a man's voice.

"Good day, prodigal daughter." The man, or rather, the *malignos*, had emerged from behind the crumbling structure of an old building, such as The Ancients had inhabited, and which was set partly into the glistening rock face, as if it had been uncovered by a landslide or treasure hunters. Other such buildings projected from the cavern's wall at various intervals, as well as burst through the ground, the floor of the chamber scattered with the remains of mighty superstructures and those mysterious engines and machines that had driven the old world's cities. As much as the stairway, the cavern reminded me that, before the war, trade between the Netherworld and Earth-Above had been commonplace. "Good day, good day. If it is day up there, that is. It is so hard to tell, now that we are again condemned to the depths, with so little hope of enjoying what humans take for granted. I think *you* took it for granted that you might find only inhuman scum in these parts, hmmm, my dear? Some of those undesirables who would sell out their own people. Not totally unlike yourself, yes?"

Beside the *malignos* stood Defoe, the long, taloned hand of the Netherworlder placed on the boy's shoulder. "Gala Diaz Garcita," said the *malignos*, his mouth opening to display rows of pointed teeth, "I believe that is what you now call yourself? I remember when you were called Aberattzia. Aberattzia de Profundis. But don't you remember *me*, my chick? Don't you remember your Uncle Nimrod?" His wings unfolded, and, after beating at the air, were brought flush against his side, the tips flexed slightly so that the pinions might scratch at the scarlet lamellae of his pot belly. As if at that signal several *malignos* threw themselves from their eminence, their own wings, bat-like, transparent, and criss-crossed with veins that were like frets of wood, extending as they fell and swooped towards us.

"I am no longer one of the family!" cried Gala, her voice carrying throughout the chamber and reverberating off its cavernous walls. "I am no longer of the house de Profundis!"

I reached for my sword. "Who is he?" I said.

"Sus, he really is my uncle," she said. "Don't you know that a Netherworld family must assume responsibility for the crimes of its members? It is our law. That little creep" – she pointed at Defoe who was taking pains to avoid her eyes – "that *rat* who bought your services is a *malignos* agent. He's stitched us up." She took a few steps towards uncle and his human protégé; stopped; looked heavenward, her attention distracted by the beat of wings and a shadow cast from something that passed overhead.

Above her, two *malignos* carried a net. They hovered

for a moment, and then let the net drop. The net – made of finely woven steel and weighted at the corners – smothered her and, screaming, she was borne to the ground. I drew *Espiritu Sancto*.

Several other *malignos* glided past me. I slashed at them, and was showered with atomized scales, each fragment twinkling in the monotonous blue air like a mote of fairy dust. The one I had wounded yelped, but continued his trajectory, his face briefly registering a flicker of anger and reproach. Landing where Gala had fallen, he and the *malignos* that swiftly followed began to drag the net and its burden towards Nimrod. Gala writhed within the confinement of her steel prison. "Devils!" she cried, incipient hysteria translating itself into high rhetoric. "Spawn of Satan! I walk with Christ now! I've seen dawns and noons and sunsets! *Real* sunsets! I've tasted fresh air and felt the monsoon! I won't have you take me back to the shadows!"

I ran towards her, but was almost immediately thrown onto my face by a blow from behind, *Espiritu Sancto* knocked out of my hand and skittering across the obsidian floor. A webbed foot, its hooked nails digging into my shoulder blades, prevented me from rising. Defoe disengaged himself from his patron's arm and retrieved my rapier from where it had come to rest.

"I'm sorry, Dr Pike," he said. "I didn't lie about everything. I really did get lost in the tunnels beneath London. But I had no Gala to rescue me. I've often dreamt about how things might have worked out if, like you, I'd met a beautiful *malignos* who would have taken me back to the surface. *I* was fated to stay below. Alas, the story I told you was, for the most part, no more than wishful thinking."

"You modelled that story on my own, didn't you?"

"I was envious, Dr Pike. But what use is it to dream? After I was captured by the *malignos*, I knew I had to put away my dreams. My new friends had plans for me."

"They turned you," I said.

"They made me see the truth: that I no longer belonged on the Earth's surface. One survives as best one can, Dr Pike. It's nothing personal. When I was asked to travel through the tunnels and caverns that link West with East, I consented; but it was not as if I had any great choice. I have never had many choices, Dr Pike, not in all my fourteen years. Become a tunnel rat, or be simplified; become a *malignos* agent, or starve. What kind of choices are they? When I arrived here and was asked to help bring in *malignos* traitors, then –"

"You've done well," said Nimrod, tiring of his protégé's soliloquy. And then he trained his eyes upon Gala. The net was wrapped about her so tightly that blood trickled from beneath her scales where the steel mesh bit into the unprotected flesh. "So: you call upon Christ. And we are devils, hmmm? You learnt, it seems, not merely treachery when you entered the human world. You learnt the rankest of superstitions, too." And then, choosing, for the moment, to ignore his captive niece, he took a few steps towards me, stooping so that he might study my face. Pressed against the ground, I grimaced; the bitter, volcanic ash that carpeted the obsidian had found its way into my mouth and nose. Nimrod smiled,

the scales that hung from his cheekbones so heavy that they jingled at the tensing of his muscles. "We always find them in the end," he continued. "The ones who betray us, who go over to the humans in exchange for a little sunlight. The ones who forget their own proud history."

"What history?" I said, pining for my sword and unable to skewer him with anything but limp words. "You don't have a history. You're as ignorant of the origins of the *malignos* as are humans." Nimrod's smile withered, and then was reborn as a smirk.

"Some say," he said, "that we buried ourselves beneath the Earth some two thousand years ago to avoid the persecution of mankind. We were different creatures then, they say. We were called the children of the perverse. A great catastrophe had occurred in a parallel universe, and the spiritual radiation from that cataclysm infected our own. That was when some human beings began to change. They looked as others looked, but their souls were alien. But the day came when they made other bodies for themselves, bodies expressive of the perversity of their spirit: cat bodies, rat bodies, snake bodies, shark and spider bodies. And thus they set themselves apart forever from mankind. And for centuries they thrived until human jealousy at last drove them into the Earth's bowels. Human jealousy, and human hatred. In the darkness, they became what mankind had claimed they had always been: hobgoblins, demons, *malignos*... They became us."

"Two thousand years ago," I said. "Sure." I knew I had to filibuster until I could find a way of getting my hands on *Espiritu Sancto*. "Listen: I used to lecture in history, and I tell you that you are talking of the interregnum we call the Dark Ages. A time of which next-to-nothing is known. Just as next-to-nothing is known about The Ancients." I had chosen, as the subject of my doctoral thesis, a manuscript I had discovered in the National Archives. Its illuminations – which represented copies of copies of copies of copies – were inscribed *Turner, Leonardo, Giotto, Bacon*. But there had been little to give context; no text, apart from enigmatic incantations and spells, that might have provided clues that would have allowed me to decipher the times in which those illuminations had originated. "One might as well speculate about the machinery which litters this cavern," I concluded.

"Speculate?" he said. "I do not speculate. The Netherworld, by trading in such machinery, will one day be rich. That is certain. And that is all I *need* to know. We will not allow humans to steal from us like before."

"Indeed," I said. "The war is over and the peace treaty concedes your people the right to trade in artefacts. So how does it profit you to hold Gala like this?"

"It profits my sense of rectitude. It profits my sense of proportion." Nimrod gestured to one of the *malignos* that attended him. The servant walked forward and delivered a goblet into his hands. "What do we have after three centuries of war? Nothing. Only the shadows that have been our lot for millennia. Many of us are so hard-pressed that we have to surface at night and enter human towns to steal food. Yes; there is every need to

punish those amongst our own who helped condemn us to this half-life below ground."

He moved towards Gala, the goblet held before him. "Perhaps you are right about our mutual ignorance of the past. The time of The Ancients is a time of mystery. And all we know of the Dark Ages that followed is that it was a time of blood and sorrow. A time when men forgot how to use the machines that had sustained the ancient world, the machines that gave men new bodies, the machines that took them to the stars. Perhaps the notion that we have evolved from those we call the 'children of the perverse' is a myth." He glanced at me, a tight-lipped smile again precipitating the jingle-jangle of his scales. It was a sound that reminded me of wind chimes. Wind chimes outside a haunted house. "Indeed, we may have simply evolved from those you call the *masa*. The deliberate cretinization of those unable to work precedes the war between the Netherworld and Earth-Above. It precedes, in one form or another, known history. For they say that even in the time of The Ancients, those they called the 'information poor' who huddled outside the walls of the world's great cities were pacified by cheap pleasures and drugs. In which case –"

A *malignos* took Gala by a hank of hair that had spilled through the interstices of the net. He jerked her head from the floor. Another *malignos* pushed thumb and forefinger through the netting and pinched her nose until she was forced to open her mouth. "In which case my errant kinswoman will be joining our ancestors, in spirit if not in body." Kneeling down, his genitals dangling amongst the lapilli, guano and ash, his pot-belly squashed against his knees, he held the goblet above Gala's lips; and then he tipped it, so that the murky liquid within poured into her mouth. She choked; spat; but inevitably, I saw her throat contract as she was forced to take some of the stuff down. "Oh yes, there are many things in the Netherworld which we will again sell to mankind. We even have an antidote to this drug. What confusion that will sow when we distribute it amongst the *masa*. Ah, when those cretins wake, they will burn down your cities!"

Two little *malignos* girls danced about Gala. They must have been about the age Gala had been when she had left home. "Simple sister," they sang, "simple sister, tra-la-la, simple sister, ha-ha-ha!"

Defoe took a step forward; stopped; placed a hand over his heart; took another step. "This thing you do," he said, quietly, "this thing isn't right." His breathing was laboured and he had spoken with considerable effort. Each word had had to be squeezed out of vocal cords constipated by a lifetime spent parroting the psychopathic sentiments of the Darkling Isle. He hurried to his patron's side and put his arms about the creature's midsection. "Don't you understand? Humans were going to simplify *me* unless I spied for them. It's why I hate mankind. It's why I sided with the Netherworld." Nimrod grunted and shook the boy off.

"Oh no," I said, my voice breaking as I realized what had been done. "No, no. Please no." I began to sob. "You take the only thing she ever truly possessed. Why, why do this to her? Oh God forgive you, and God forgive me."



My anguish became convulsive. It was if I had just inhaled a whole bottle of *sal volatile*, or gulped down a gallon of tisane. I bucked, turned, and, with an agonized moan, flipped onto my side, got a grip on a scaly leg, and twisted, so that the *malignos* who had pinned me to the floor, big as he was, fell sideways. I got to my feet and kicked the one I had just felled under the chin as, less readily than me, he began to rise. "Defoe!" I shouted. Nimrod, with the dart of his eye, had ordered his guards to attack.

"I'm sorry," said the boy for the second time that day. Sorry, I thought. I too was sorry, had always been sorry, but not as sorry as I planned to make him. "They told me that I would never be accepted by humans," he continued, "that I belonged here, with them." He stepped towards me, looked once over his shoulder, and then threw me the rapier.

There was a pure, infinitely satisfying sound of razor-sharp steel cutting through air as *Espiritu Sancto* wheeled towards me. How my sword sang! It sang for Gala. It sang like a choir of pitiless angels. It sang *Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, Dominus. Osanna in excelsis!* I jumped and caught the spinning blade, and, as my fingers closed about the hilt, I too sang, my sword and I, as ever, in perfect harmony. I hit the floor; went into a crouch, ready to advance on my foes.

Some of the *malignos* drew long daggers from sheaths buckled to their thighs; but most were unarmed. One such – the largest of their number – charged, in an attempt to catch me off guard. Tauntingly, I lowered my sword, bestowing on him a few extra seconds of life. He was a brute, twice as fat and ugly as the man I had faced yesterday, and a hundred times as deserving of an unpleasant fate. His trunk-like legs were scaled, but above the waist he was covered in greasy, matted hair. The hair, which reached his face, coupled with his prognathous jaw, gave him the appearance of a horned blue gorilla. As he closed in, I flicked my sword before his eyes, distracting him; then, after debating momentarily with myself whether I should attempt to scientifically stun or indeed kill the creature, chose the

only real option a gentleman, faced with such repulsive hideousness, can take, and, in keeping with my original intentions, lunged and skewered, the tip of my sword passing between the shark-like teeth and through the back of the thing's mouth. The *malignos* fell, the only blue, now, that mattered in this chamber of blue, the steel-blue of my flashing, blood-slicked rapier.

Two others closed in a flanking manoeuvre. Built like rhinoceroses, with long, single horns projecting from their brows, they hunched and ran at me with the seeming intention of punching holes through either side of my ribcage. I jumped back; they collided, the silvery horns connecting with a shower of sparks. And then I side-stepped, pinked one in the carotid artery and jabbed the other in the gut, turning the blade with a cruelty somewhat wanton, but, nevertheless, wholly amusing, as I felt it encounter the vitals.

No hangover, today, to offer the enemy a fighting chance; I was not only in form, I was at my most exquisite. I went up on my toes and began to dance like a teenage pugilist. But then, the sight of Gala spread out on the ground, so pinched by the embrace of the steel net, brought me down smartly upon my heels. With slow, flat-footed determination – a pugilist, now, who had outgrown his salad style and was opting to go for power – I closed in on Uncle Nimrod. The pot-bellied fool had not moved since the moment I had sprung into action.

Most of the *malignos* now backed away, and, as soon as I had sunk the tip of *Espiritu Sancto* into the solar plexus of their astonished chief and watched him drop to the ground, those that were left followed suit.

I ran to where Gala lay. "Get over here," I said to Defoe as I struggled to free her. With the boy's assistance I soon peeled back the mesh and had her sitting up. Above us, *malignos* circled, leaderless and unsure of how to proceed.

I looked into Gala's eyes. They had dulled, and yet at the same time were curiously focused, though upon something I had no inkling of, as beneath my under-



standing as certain abstruse areas of mathematics and hermeneutics were above it. Saliva dribbled from her chin. "Ritchie," she murmured, thickly, as if her tongue had suddenly swollen and filled her mouth, "I'm late for mass. The sisters will be angry. Help me, Ritchie. I don't want to go back on the streets. The barrio's a bad place. Oh, what's all this darkness? Tunnels. Corridors. Passages. If only I could breathe the fresh air. I saw the surface once. My mother took me. We were looking for firewood and food. It's so beautiful, all the flowers and the trees. And the sky, Ritchie, how blue it is! Not like the blue in the Netherworld, no, not like it at all!" Her head lolled forward, and, behind her eyes, the tiny flame that had struggled to blaze, the flame that was Gala, was extinguished. "Uh, uh," she moaned. "Uh, uh, uh."

I turned to Defoe. I was tempted to kill the little shit there and then and let his bones lie with those of his *malignos* friends, four of whom already sprawled face down on the ground, despatched with that elegance and grace which, I like to think no, no, I felt no grace at that moment; nothing to convince me that my essential nature was anything but black. "We have to get her to the surface," I said, deferring my plans to slit him from nape to chaps. I needed his help, and he, whatever his motives, had shown himself ready to give it.

Between us we hauled Gala to her feet and walked her towards the door by which we had entered the cavern. A *malignos* swooped; I flinched at the wake of air as he passed over our heads. He turned, came back at us, long taloned fingers stretched before him. Slashing, I felt my sword connect just as the speeding form became a blur. A spout of blood arced and splattered my face. The wounded enemy flew upward, his hand to his throat, and, with a desperate flapping of his wings, made his way back to the gallery. His comrades maintained their distance.

"I know this one," said a *malignos* hovering a little way off. "He is from Europa. He has killed many of our people." Now other *malignos* retreated to the gallery. Some disappeared into holes and cracks in the rock: tunnels, I knew, that led to the city of Aeta and beyond.

"You know me, eh? The world knows me!" I shouted after them as we passed through the door, my voice echoing about the cavern's great expanse. "The world knows me for a swordsman of surpassing excellence!"

On crossing the antechamber and seeing the stairs, some still unfogged portion of Gala's brain prompted her to unfold her wings and attempt to fly. Though she could not support both my weight and the boy's, by holding onto her both the boy and I were dragged upward, our feet trailing over the steps. She flew, or rather half flew, almost standing up, her own feet raised but a few centimetres from the smooth stone gradient, until, within minutes – as if shot from a mine shaft by an explosion of gas – we had reached the entrance to the tunnel.

With trembling hands, I grabbed my lamp; lit it, and dived into the tunnel's shadows. Retracing the route that had brought us into the Netherworld, Defoe and I found it necessary to support Gala by holding her under her arms; her wings could not extend in that confined space, and she was too exhausted by her recent flight to

do more than slump between us, her feet trailing over the rough, rock-strewn ground as ours had over the stairway.

We reached the adit. I ordered Defoe to climb to the top of the fumarole. I then looped a rope about Gala's shoulders and secured it. Leaving her supine on the ledge, I ascended. With the boy and myself at the lip of the fumarole and able to share the work, we hauled Gala onto the surface.



When I had laid her down upon the lahar, Defoe walked a little way off and sat with his face in his hands. I bent over Gala, anxious to spot some sign of intelligence in her half-closed eyes. But there was none. "Uh, uh, uh," she continued to moan. I took her in my arms and gently rocked her.

Oh, I did have a soul; to my cost, I knew that now. For I felt it writhing in agony, a raw, flayed thing that had been sprinkled with salt. At the moment Gala had lost her soul to the drug *manggagawa*, my own soul had been discovered. I felt it extend its wings, just as a *malignos* might, and prepare to take flight. It was too cruel. Too cruel that whatever God or Demiurge ruled this universe had chosen to sacrifice Gala for me.

"You'll have to take her to where there are others who are simplified. She'll have no other chance of surviving," said the boy. I took off my jacket, folded it, and used it to cushion Gala's head. Then I got up; walked over to the spot where Defoe hunkered and took him by the hair, just as one of Nimrod's *malignos* had earlier taken Gala.

"You are going to escort her back to where we left the horses," I said, pulling his head back and looking down into a pair of clenched, rheumy eyes. "You will then proceed to the barrio. Get her inside the walls. Make sure of this, hear me? The only reason I don't kill you now is because I am probably as guilty as you for what has happened. Perhaps more guilty." A sob caught in my throat. I snarled, frightened that this was mere self-pity masquerading as grief, one more example of my sham existence. I had persuaded her to come here with hollow promises of a future life; a life together. Poor girl, I thought, all life with me has brought you is this great insult, this catastrophe to your being. "You will take her back to the barrio and have her decently lodged until I return."

"Return?"

"I have to go back. Your friend Nimrod said there was an antidote."

"But it's hopeless," said the boy. "Even if there is an antidote, it will, in all probability, only be found in the Netherworld's capital, where the great magi and alchemists live."

"Pandemonium?"

"Yes; and no human has succeeded in penetrating so deep into the Earth. You know that." Pandemonium. Where all the passages, tunnels and highways from all the Netherworld's cities converged. "It lies too deep," Defoe continued. It was true: it was one reason why the

war had ended in a conditional peace; we had not been able to take the enemy's chief city, which, rumour had it, lay near the Earth's core, protected from the searing heat by ancient machines that the *malignos* had managed to restart. I released the boy's hair; unbuckled my sword; laid it upon the ground; and then walked over to where I had left my backpack and, bending over, rummaged inside.

I brought out my old uniform, the uniform of a captain of the Darkling Isle. I took off my grubby white suit and assumed the aspect of one who had battled *malignos* in the depths beneath London; one whose deeds, both bloody and amorous, were still spoken of in palace and slum. Smoothing out the creases, pulling on doublet and hose, I found the uniform still fitted. Years of poverty had corrected my tendency towards corpulence. If I had crow's feet about my eyes and a little rheumatism in my joints, I was compensated for it by being lean as a greyhound. I ran my hands down the doublet's skin-tight black leather, its polished brass buttons and puffed shoulders surmounted by gold epaulettes; the leather hose with matching, studded codpiece, also in black. And then I pulled on my black calf boots, newly polished; my black leather gauntlets, the fingers cut away so that my flesh might enjoy more intimate association with the hilt of *Espiritu Sancto*. Lastly, I re-buckled *Espiritu Sancto* itself. And I was again a black knight of the isle of darkness.

I retrieved several other items from the backpack, chief amongst them a compass, water bottle, a bag of jerky, pipe, tobacco, a little opium, a money belt and a pair of field glasses. But I also found a small cracked mirror. I took out the gentleman's mascara and eye shadow that was in the top pocket of my uniform. (It was an emergency supply that I kept there for occasions when, cut off beneath the Earth, I might not be panicked by finding myself without means to re-fix my face.) Slowly, deliberately, I touched up my war paint.

I slung the strap of the water bottle over my shoulder, buckled on the money belt and used its spare utility pockets to stow my compass, jerky, pipe and tobacco. Then I hung the field glasses about my neck.

I knelt; held my sword before me, so that it substituted for a holy cross. I lowered my head, but could not pray. All I could offer the dust-filled air were these mumbled words: "I am not like Gala. I cannot see beyond this mean world and its petty hatreds and villainies. I am a selfish man, a conceited man. I am a man whose heart has been poisoned by long years of war, by the enmity of his own country, the Darkling Isle, whose people believe in nothing, because they themselves are nothing, only shadows of the Netherworld, weaned on darkness and matured in spite. But I swear that I will reach Pandemonium or die. And if I live, I will return to give my poor Gala new life. Let my existence remain as barren as the lives of my countrymen if I do not achieve this."

I rose; adjusted my rapier's scabbard so that it was more comfortable, then stepped to the edge of the fumarole and once more took up the rope.

"Mind you do as I say," I said, looking behind me. "I

will be back. You have gold. Make sure you use it to take care of her." Defoe got to his feet. I saw that he too had been crying.

"I betrayed you," he said. "How can you trust me?" How indeed. Had his *sorry* been as my own had been the other evening (ah, it seemed a lifetime ago), a mere echo reverberating about the ruins of his conscience? I did not know; but, down below, the cavern that had been the venue for our ambush would surely not remain empty for long; and it was imperative I seize the opportunity that now presented itself to pass through it and into the passages beyond, where I could begin my quest proper.

"We've all been traitors in our time, we three. Gala to her people, you to ours. But I've been the worst traitor of all."

"I will take care of her," he said. "I promise."

"You had better," I said, thinking of my own promises to Gala, and how they had brought about her ruin, but knowing I had no other choice.

And then I again descended into the fumarole.

Into the darkness I went, thinking of *malignos* that fly, *malignos* that fling themselves on you in the darkness, *malignos* whose hands surface from the ground you are walking over, grasp you by the ankles and pull you to your doom. But I thought pre-eminently about Gala. I knew now her life was my life; that if either of us should perish, then so would the other. And so into the shadows I went, the clear blue sky growing smaller, another, eerier sort of blue awaiting below; and Gala went with me. For as I descended, I think I desecrated for the first real time in my life, a light. From out of the pitch-black depths it seeped into my soul, if soul I should have; it was as if the sun had broken through the dark clouds that always swathed the Darkling Isle, splinters of light invading the streets and towers of London. And it was not like on Snake Island; that light did not make me ill; its rays did not prick my eyes like white-hot gimlets. That light was cool; it was beautiful; it was Gala. Let God fulminate in his heaven; if I should be lost, or come to lie bleeding as I did when you first came to me, in the darkness, and in my despair, then I thought, out of the depths, Gala, my own goddess, my divine:

Let my cry come unto *thee*.




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**Richard Calder**, who hails from Essex but has itchy feet, is currently in the Philippines. His last story in these pages was "The Embarkation for Cythera" (issue 106), later incorporated into his novel *Cythera* (1998). We are pleased to welcome him back with the above story, which may, just possibly, turn out to be the first of a series...



# The ASTRONOMER

*Zoran Zivkovic*

## - 1 -

He had to escape from the monastery.

He had no business being there at all; he had never wanted to become a monk, he'd said as much to his father, but his father had been as relentless as ever, and his mother had lacked the audacity to oppose him, for all that she knew that her son's inclinations and talents lay elsewhere. The monks had treated him badly from the start: they had abused and humiliated him, saddled him with the dirtiest jobs, and when their nocturnal visits commenced he could stand it no longer.

At last he fled, pursued by a hideously screaming throng of pudgy, unruly brothers, torches and mantles raised, certain he could never escape. His legs became heavier and heavier as he attempted to reach the monastery gate but it seemed to be deliberately withdrawing, becoming more distant at every step.

And then, just before they reached him, the monks suddenly stopped in their tracks, their obscene shouts suddenly turning to frightened screams of distress. They began to cross themselves feverishly, pointing at something ahead of him, but all he could see there was the wide open gate and the clear night sky stretching beyond it. The gate was no longer retreating before him; once again he felt light and fast.

A tremendous relief filled him as he reached the arched vault of the great gate. He knew they could no longer catch him, that he had gotten away. He stepped outside to meet the stars, but his foot didn't fall on solid ground, but on something soft and squishy. He started to sink, as if in quicksand. He flailed with his arms, but could find no support.

He realized what he had fallen into by the terrible stench. It was the deep midden pit at the foot of the monastery walls, where every day the cooks threw the unusable entrails of slaughtered animals through a small trapdoor of planks prematurely rotted by contact with the foul waste. The cruel priests had often threatened the terrified boy that he, too, would end up there if he refused to satisfy their degenerate lusts. Such a pit should never have been located at the entrance to a holy edifice, but this ultimate sacrilege for some reason seemed neither strange nor unfitting to them or himself.

He sank into the thick tangle of bloated intestines, so rapidly that they had almost reached his shoulders before terror convulsed him. A few moments more and he would drown in the slimy morass. Unable to do anything else, he raised his desperate eyes and there, illuminated by the reflection of the distant torches, he saw silhouetted a naked, bony creature squatting on the edge of the pit, its malicious eyes fixed on him, its mouth twisted in an ugly snigger.

He could see neither horns nor tail, but even without such signs he had no trouble recognizing it; now, too late, he realized what had terrified the monks. He froze under its malignant stare, suddenly yearning to disappear under the slimy surface. The stench of blood and decay was no longer nauseous but precious, his only refuge from the most terrible of fates.

Thus, once he was completely immersed in that broth of blood and bile, it seemed to him that it was not, after all, the discarded entrails of pigs, sheep and goats, but like his mother's womb, soft, warm and in no way distasteful. He curled up in it, knees under his chin, as endless bliss filled his being. No one could do anything to him here; here he was safe, protected.

But this illusion of paradise was not allowed to last very long. Demonic eyes, sharp as augers, quickly

pierced the layers of maternal flesh to reach his tiny, crouched being. He tried to withdraw before them, boring even deeper into the womb, to the very cervix, but his persecutor was relentless. The thin membrane surrounding his refuge burst the moment when, having no further refuge, he braced his back against it. He fell out – into reality.

And with him, out of his dream, came the eyes that continued their piercing stare.

He couldn't see them in the almost total darkness, but their immaterial touch was no less palpable for that. Suddenly awake, he realized that someone else was with him in the cell. He had not heard him come in, even though no one had oiled the door in years, and it squeaked terribly. How strange for him to fall into such a deep sleep; the night before their execution only the toughest criminals unburdened by conscience or the fear of impending death, managed to sleep, and he certainly wasn't one of those.

He raised his head and looked around, confused. Although he felt he was not alone, his heart started racing when he actually made out the shape of a large man sitting on the bare planks of the empty bed opposite. Had it not been for the light from the weakly burning torch in the hall, slanting into the cell through a narrow slit on the iron-plated door, he would not have been able to see him at all. As it was, although he could make out pale hands folded in the man's lap, his head was completely swallowed in shadow, as if it were missing.

He wondered who it could be. A priest, most likely; only priests were permitted to visit prisoners the night before they were taken to be executed. Had the hour struck already? He quickly looked up at the high window with its rusty bars, but there was no sign of daybreak. The night was pitch-black, without a moon, so the opening appeared only as a rectangle of darkness slightly paler than the interior of the cell.

He knew they wouldn't take him to the stake before dawn, so he stared uncertainly at the motionless figure. Why had he come so soon? Would they be burning him earlier, perhaps, before the rabble gathered? But that made no sense. It was for this senseless multitude that they organized the public executions of heretics, to impress upon them what awaited those who dared to set themselves above the catechism. The sight of the condemned, his body tied or nailed to the stake, writhing in terrible agony while tongues of flame darted around him, was enough to discourage even the boldest and most rebellious.

Or maybe this was a final effort to persuade him to renounce his discovery. This would be the best outcome for the Church, of course, but he had not the slightest intention of helping them. On the contrary: had he come this far just to give up now? If that was their intention, their efforts would be vain.

"You have had a bad dream," the unseen head told him.

The voice belonged to no one he had met during the investigation and trial. It sounded gentle, but that proved nothing; he was well acquainted with the

hypocrisy of priests, and the worst were those who seemed understanding and helpful, then suddenly displayed the truth of their callous nature.

"Why do you think that?" the prisoner asked, stretching numbly on the dirty, worn blanket that was his only bedding.

"I watched you twitch restlessly in your sleep."

"You watched me in the total darkness?"

"Eyes get used to the dark if they spend enough time in it. I can see quite well here."

"There are eyes and eyes. Some get accustomed to it, others don't. I wound up here because I refused to get accustomed to the dark."

The fingers in the lap slowly interlaced, and the prisoner suddenly realized that they looked so ghostly pale because he was wearing white gloves, such as only high church dignitaries wore. That meant that the man in the cell with him was no common priest, sent to escort him to the stake. So; it was not time yet.

"Do you think that you will dispel the darkness with the brilliance of your fiery death at the stake?" The tone was not cynical; it sounded more compassionate than otherwise.

"I don't know. I couldn't think of any other way."

"It is also a most painful way. You have had the opportunity to witness death by burning at the stake, have you not?"

"Yes, of course. While I was at the monastery they took us several times to watch the execution of some poor woman accused of witchcraft. It's a compulsory part of novice-training, as you surely know. There's nothing like fear to inspire blind loyalty to the faith."

"Yes, fear is a mighty weapon in the armoury of the Church. But you, it seems, have acquired immunity to its influence!"

The prisoner rubbed his stiff neck. He could stomach the swill they fed him, which wasn't that much worse than lenten fare at the monastery; he could breathe the stale, humid air that surrounded him; he could think and sleep above the constant squealing and scratching of hungry rodents that he'd been told were prone to bite the ears and noses of careless prisoners. But nothing about this mouldy prison was worse than the lack of a pillow.

"What do you expect me to say to that? That I'm not afraid of being burned? That I'm indifferent to the pain I'll soon be suffering at the stake? Only an imbecile would not be afraid."

"But if you're not an imbecile, why didn't you avoid such an end?"

"I had no choice."

"Of course you did. The only thing required of you was to make public renunciation of and repentance for your erroneous convictions, which is the minimum request of the court of the Inquisition when serious heretical sins are involved. Had you complied you might have kept your title of Astronomer Royal and been allowed to go on teaching students."

"Who would attend the lectures of an Astronomer Royal who had renounced his discovery out of fear?"

"There is a question that comes before that. Why did

you have to announce it in the first place? What did you seek to achieve by that?"

"What should I have done – kept it a secret, all for myself?"

"You were aware that it runs counter to the teachings of Mother Church. You should have expected her to undertake all measures to protect herself."

"Of course I expected that. But I was relying on her hands being tied."

"It doesn't look like that, judging by the sentence you received."

"Oh, you know perfectly well that the stake is not what the Church wanted. It was a forced move after all attempts to talk me into co-operating failed."

"On the evidence of your physical condition, I wouldn't say that they have tried all possible means. You don't look like a man who has suffered the Inquisition's full treatment."

"Well, I'm not a witch. They didn't have to force me to agree to some nonsensical accusation. I did not deny my guilt. That's why the whole investigation proceeded like some kind of attempt at friendly persuasion, even though, presumably to impress me, they'd lined up in the background all the devices to mutilate, cut, break and crush. They just stood there, as mute reminders. I wasn't even threatened with any of them, let alone put to any torture. You don't torture someone who's only valuable to you as an ally. What would be the use of an Astronomer Royal who was lame or blind?"

"Not even after the alliance has been irrevocably called off? The Inquisition can hardly boast of the virtues of forgiveness and compassion."

"That is why it's renowned for its patience and acumen. The sentence was handed down, but I have not been burned yet. There's still time. Attempts to win me over to the Church's side will continue to the very end. I expect a final plea even after they chain me to the stake, with the dumb executioner brandishing his torch in the background. That's why you're here, is it not?"

There was an indistinct commotion from down the corridor, followed by the sharp sound of a key turning and someone groaning painfully as he was pitched into his cell with all the delicacy of a diseased carcass tossed over the wall of a castle under siege. The Inquisition's investigators did most of their work at night, and conducted their primary investigations in the basement whence frequently proceeded (despite the thick walls) horrible screams. These served to weaken such remnants of the will to resist as other prisoners awaiting their time might retain. As they moved off after slamming the door shut, one of the guards muttered something to the other, evoking a raucous laugh. For a long time that shout of laughter echoed like thunder through the stonework.

"But you, of course, will neither relent nor repent." The voice half-stated, half-questioned once the echo had died away.

"Of course."

"And your reason? Your real reason?"

"What do you mean?"

"You're certainly not the sort of simple-minded idealist

who gets involved because he doesn't understand how the world works, what forces set it in motion. Far from it. Everything you have done from the beginning shows evidence of careful planning; you've lit a fire that only you can put out. It takes great resource and great imagination to turn the tables on a service with the experience of the Inquisition, to tie its hands as you put it. It also takes the sort of fanatical courage that always fails idealists at the crucial moment – the willingness to go all the way, no matter what the cost. You naturally shy away from the pain that awaits you at the stake, but you will go to your execution nonetheless, just because that outcome will do the Church most harm. Yet what has she ever done to you?"

The prisoner was struggling to sit up on the hard bed, against the stabbing pain all down his stiff back. As he did so, a scene from his dream suddenly rose to the surface of his memory. It was very vivid, though motionless, like some sort of ugly picture: the twisted faces of the monks lustfully reaching for his thin, helpless body.

"Isn't it still a little early for my last confession?"

"I'm not here to hear your confession."

"Oh, yes. That almost slipped my mind! You're here to prevail upon me to change my mind. But if you truly believe what you just said, it must be clear to you that's impossible."

"It is clear to me."

"Then why are you wasting your time?"

There was no immediate reply from across the cell. A hand rose from a lap and reached for something that lay unseen on the wooden bench. A moment later it returned to the flickering shaft of light from the torch in the hall. Now it was holding a slender black cane surmounted with a carved white figure.

"I have more than enough time." The voice seemed to become muffled, more distant.

"But I don't. My hours are numbered."

"That's right. Soon they will come to take you to the stake, but before that you will be given one last chance to accept the Church's offer. As we both know, you will refuse. Although, it makes no difference, really."

"It does make a difference. If I accept, everything I have ever achieved or discovered will have been in vain."

"No, it won't. The damage was done the moment you announced your discovery, and that cannot be undone. The fluttering of the butterfly's wings should have been prevented before it initiated the storm. Even if the Church made a sincere ally out of you, it would only slow the harmful effects, and not for long."

"Do you really think that consideration sufficient to change my mind? I'd expected you to come up with something more convincing."

"I have no intention of dissuading you. But that is the way things stand, nonetheless. Heresy has been sown on fertile ground. Neither the stake nor repentance will turn your students away. They will start to spread forbidden knowledge, to add to it. Once set in motion, this course cannot be stopped, even though the Inquisition will undertake everything to obstruct it. You have let the genie out of the bottle, and he can no longer return to it, even if he – even if *you* chose with all your heart. The



Church will finally recognize this inexorability, but it will be too late by then."

The prisoner strained to make out the face hidden in the impenetrable obscurity of the cell, but without success, even though by now his eyes were fully adjusted to the gloom.

"It ill becomes a man of God to have so little faith in the future of the Church!"

"What makes you think I am a man of God?"

A pall of deep silence descended on the cell, and for several long moments the prisoner failed to notice what was wrong. He had spent many nights alone in this place, and there had always been some sort of noise: moaning from a neighbouring cell, the screeching of rusty hinges, the murmur of the guards, muffled cries from the basement, the scrabbling of mice and rats, the creaking boards on which he lay, distant sounds of the outside world. Now all of these had mysteriously ceased.

"Who are you?" he asked, finally mustering the courage to break this sepulchral silence. The darkness made no answer, but once again the prisoner felt the stab of the piercing eyes that had followed him out of his dream. "The Tempter?" The words were almost inaudible, so that he couldn't have said whether he spoke them or only thought them.

"Why should that bother you?" The voice remained just as gentle. "If I am the Tempter, then we are on the same side. We fight the same opponent."

"Why... why are you here? What do you want from me?" He felt an atavistic urge to cross himself, but at the last moment rejected it as inappropriate to the circumstances.

"I don't want anything from you. On the contrary, I have a gift for you. Call it a token of our alliance. An excursion."

"An excursion?"

"Don't worry, you won't leave this cell, and you will get back on time, before they come for you."

"What kind of journey will it be if I stay here?"

"The only kind possible, given these conditions: a journey through time."

The prisoner blinked. This was not really happening. He was still asleep. Yet there was no awakening, such as invariably follows that realization. He brought his hand to his face and pinched his cheek hard. The pain was real. Too real.

"I don't want... to go... anywhere."

"But you'll like it there, I'm sure of that. The future holds pleasant surprises for you."

"The future?"

"Yes. Almost three hundred years from now."

"Why would I want to go to... the future?"

"Out of curiosity, above all. Aren't you interested in discovering whether you really succeeded in outwitting the Church? You certainly appear self-confident, but you must surely retain some shadow of doubt, somewhere. What if your sacrifice should prove to have been in vain?"

"But you said it wasn't. That my students –"

"A moment ago you found that unconvincing. In any case, can you believe in the word of the Tempter, even

when you and he are on the same side?"

"What would the future corroborate? What would I see there?" As he asked these questions, he felt completely foolish. How easily had he let himself be drawn into a crazy, impossible conversation! Where was the common sense he was so proud of? Had he gone out of his mind? He had heard that sometimes happened to people waiting to be burned at the stake. Fear twisted their minds.

"A better question would be what you won't see. First of all, you won't see a monastery at the top of this hill. Its walls will still be there, but it will no longer contain dark, humid cells, corridors all sooty from torches, or a torture chamber in the basement."

"The monastery will fall into ruin?"

"No, on the contrary. It will have been... converted."

"What can you convert a monastery into?"

The answer was preceded by brief silence that seemed to indicate a certain indecision. "I suppose that in the end you would recognize it without my help, although it will certainly look... strange. But I ought to prepare you. You will not have much time, and the shock of the future can be stupefying. At the time of your visit, instead of a monastery this will be an astronomical observatory."

He knew that he should make some reply to that, that it was expected of him, but he couldn't find a word to utter. His vocal cords were vibrating, forming confused questions, but his throat had closed completely and no sound came out. He stared blankly ahead, his mouth dry.

In the total silence that reigned once again, a white-gloved hand put the cane between the knees, then disappeared into the folds of the black robe. It took a moment to find something there, then reappeared with a round flat object on the open palm. Golden reflections shone from its engraved curves. A thumb moved along the edge of the object and the lid popped open.

The hand extended towards the prisoner, but he remained stock-still. It was not indecision; the spasm that had closed his throat had now spread to his entire body. He wanted to move, to do something – anything – he couldn't stay here motionless forever, but his muscles completely refused to obey.

"Oh yes, before you leave there is one more thing you should know. It will please you, I believe. The observatory will be named after you."

The movement with which he accepted the watch had nothing to do with his will. It seemed to him that someone else received the Tempter's gift, that he was just an observer who should, indeed, warn the reckless sinner not to go ahead, that this was insane. He wouldn't have listened, anyway, his soul was already lost. Nothing could help him any more.

The watch face radiated a bright whiteness. In the dark cell it was a lighthouse summoning sailors, the flame of a candle attracting buzzing insects, a star lurking the glass eye of the telescope. And over it were two ornate hands set at a right angle, forming a large letter "L".

# -2-

Staring at the shiny surface, he failed to notice the changes that had started to take place. Something sparkled in the cell, apparitions passed through it more transparent than ghosts, and the spectre on the other bed instantly dissolved into nothingness. Only the sudden daylight behind the high, barred window attracted his attention.

*Isn't it still very early?* he asked himself, raising his eyes in bewilderment.

But the time of miracles had just begun. His eyelids barely had time to register the light when the window was dark again. The astronomer in him opened his mouth to contest the obvious, but was silenced by the stronger voice of the child who cares not at all whether something is possible or not, as long as it is fascinating.

Many short interchanges of light and darkness took place before the child had had enough of this monotonous kaleidoscope, finally letting the scientist think about solving the mystery. There was only one explanation, of course, but to accept it one must first accept the impossible almost as an act of faith.

Before him the days and nights were passing at an accelerated rate, but he couldn't frame the questions his reason dictated. He had lost that right the moment he took the watch. In any event, did it matter how? If this was how to travel to the future, so be it.

Finally the hypnotic flashing of blue-grey and black images in the stone window tired even the astronomer. He turned around – and at first it seemed that the dizzy rush through time had stopped. Nothing was moving, everything looked fixed, unchanging. And then he realized that this was only an illusion. There could be no rapid changes here: the monastery walls were built to withstand the centuries.

Nonetheless, the cell held a few things made of less durable material. He stood transfixed as he watched the boards on the bed across from him gradually swell from the constant humidity, then split and fall to the ground where they slowly reduced to a shapeless mass on the flags.

He jumped up from his bed when it struck him that the same fate must befall the boards on which he was sitting. And truly, they too had decayed to sawdust. He, however, had felt nothing: if the possibility had not crossed his mind, he would have continued to sit calmly on nothing, in midair.

The wooden door was considerably thicker, but in the end it, too, succumbed to decay. First the steel bars fell off, then the hinges gave way, cracks appeared, then gaps and holes until finally there was nothing to stop him from stepping into the corridor. The cell had ceased to be a prison. But beyond the threshold, freedom was an impenetrable darkness which by now no one bothered to dispel with torches.

Thoughts of freedom put him in mind of the many miserable prisoners who must have sojourned here after his time. During this rapid movement through time he

could not see them, of course, though for fleeting moments he had a perhaps illusory feeling that there was someone else with him. During the instants of darkness that were nights a bulging shape seemed to loom on the bed opposite, but too briefly for him to make anything of it. In the flashes of daylight that were days, something would flicker in front of him occasionally, a hint of movement perhaps representing someone sitting motionless for a long time, but it was as cryptic as a flash seen from the corner of one eye.

The ceiling disappeared too suddenly for him to gasp in surprise. It was there one moment, then gone without trace, as though a giant had taken a huge lid off the monastery. At the same time, all the partition walls were removed, leaving only the solid outer walls that no longer had any windows.

The rapidly changing days and night were incomparably more exciting with the entire firmament spread above him than before, when he could see only a tiny corner of the sky. The entire universe seemed to be confiding a secret message to him in a series of hasty whispers.

But he was not allowed time to figure out its meaning. Just as mysteriously as the old roof vanished, it was replaced a few moments later with another, though quite unlike the old. He found himself inside an enormous, space enclosed by a gigantic dome. Only cathedrals boast such roofs, he thought, but this was certainly no cathedral; no cathedral dome has a wide slit cut through the centre, let alone a large cylinder pointing upwards through that opening.

He didn't realize that the voyage through time was over because there was no deceleration; it happened all at once. He was looking at the empty opening in the vault over his head, but many heartbeats had to pass before he finally noticed that the flashing light and dark had stopped. The night sky that settled in his eyes was sprinkled with the familiar clusters of stars visible through the thin mountain air.

A click in his hand jolted him out of the paralysis that had overcome him. The watch had completely slipped his mind, although it had remained in his outstretched palm the whole time. Now it had closed, its magic task accomplished. His first thought was to put it in his pocket, then he decided to should keep it in his hand; that idea would have shown inadmissible disrespect.

Slowly and timidly he began to look around the semi-darkness of the large area. As wondrous things whose purpose he could not divine entered his field of vision, he remembered the Tempter's words; he had said that in the end he would have seen for himself that it was an astronomical observatory. The Tempter must have greatly overestimated his perceptions. There was nothing here he could recognize: no telescope, no sextant or astrolabe, not even a celestial globe or flat map of the stars, or brass model of the planetary system.

Instead, the circular wall was covered for the most part with unusual windows. They shone in a variety of colours, but it could not have been with light from outside since it was dark. Some forms were moving on them and he cautiously went up to one part of the wall

to get a better look. They turned out to be yellow numbers that proceeded as far as the eye could see in horizontal rows against blue or red backgrounds, appearing at one end and disappearing at the other, although the device that was writing them was nowhere to be seen.

He would have stood there a long time, staring at this sparkling display whose meaning he had no idea how to approach, let alone penetrate, had it not been for the sound of quiet voices suddenly erupting behind him. He started in complete surprise. In his first moment of confusion all he felt was the instinctive need to hide somewhere, but there was no time for that. When he turned around, just a few steps from him were two tall figures – a man and a woman – dressed in long white robes, heading his way, talking in hushed tones.

They must have seen him, it was unavoidable since he was standing right there in front of them, paralysed and bewildered. But they passed right by him, paying no attention to his conspicuous presence, as if he were completely invisible. He stood there for a long time, immobile, trying to get used to this impossibility, his temples pounding.

The figures in white approached a window that was considerably larger than the others, but unlit, and started to touch some of the bumps that protruded under it. The window suddenly lit up, but it did not display a stream of numbers like the others. Instead it showed something that the prisoner could finally make sense of. The star field seemed far denser, brighter and sharper, but was basically the same that he remembered watching through his own small telescope.

But how could the picture in the window and the view through the telescope be the same? What kind of window was that? That question was soon answered, but his acceptance took a lot longer. As the two people continued to touch the bumps the scene slowly started to change. The change itself was familiar, but he had no idea how it was done. He would have achieved the same effect by slowly raising his telescope: some stars would disappear under the lower edge, while others would appear above. But here the window did not move at all.

Then he heard something buzzing behind him. It was quite feeble, like the sound of a distant bee. He would probably not have turned round but for the sensation of pins and needles at the back of his head – the tension of premonition. Something was going on behind his back, something big was moving.

The heavy upright cylinder in the lower part of the slit in the dome slowly rose towards the highest point, although he could not see how it moved. It seemed to be doing it by itself, with the help of neither ropes nor winch.

He realized what was happening before the cylinder stopped, at an angle of about seventy degrees. So, the Tempter had not overestimated him too much; it was only a matter of proportion. Even though it was gigantic, the telescope retained its original shape. What he could not understand was how the eyepiece had been moved. Instead of being the only place it could be, at the bottom of the cylinder, it was on the wall like a big window that everyone could look at.

The picture on it stabilized for just a moment before a new change started. Stars began to flow over all the edges, as if the telescope were rushing through the air at an unbelievable speed, even though it was resting immobile. It penetrated further and further into the dark expanse, reaching for unattainable infinity.

The impression was intoxicating, delightful. And then, as if this were not enough, music resounded. The woman in white went for a moment to a smaller window and touched something. In response, crystalline sounds of heavenly harmony reverberated from all sides. He could see no musicians or instruments, he could understand nothing, but he did not care. He was undergoing that which can be experienced perhaps only once in a lifetime: rapture.

The two climaxes merged into one. One point in the middle of the picture started to get bigger, to expand. At first it was a star like the countless stars surrounding it, then it was a circle, then a ring, then finally it burst into a lacy flower that filled the entire window. The moment it opened its rosy, insubstantial petals the music streamed upward, greeting with an upsurge of joy the appearance of the yellow nucleus – the hidden eye of the Creator himself.

He was not filled with frustration when everything around him suddenly froze and became silent. He had known this would happen, that the watch cover must open again. The moment of the re-direction was perfect. The epiphany had happened. Could he dare hope for anything greater?

Return trips always seem shorter than departures. There were no more surprises and wonders to slow down time. Even though he felt awe as he watched the previous sequence in reverse – the disappearance of the dome, the return of the barred windows, the re-assembly of doors and beds, the flickering of days and nights – his thoughts were elsewhere.

By the end of the return journey his confused thoughts had crystallized into a single, all-important question. As abruptly as before he found himself in his cell once again. At first, while his eyes were still blinded by the flashes of day and night, he could discern no figure facing him across the cell. Icy fingers of horror tightened around his chest. What if he wasn't there any more? If he had only been playing with him? That would be just like the Tempter. Then he never would know ...

"So?" came a gentle voice from the darkness.

He tried to muffle his sigh of relief, but his effort was futile in the murky silence. In any case, there was no time for prevarication, which would surely be ineffective; he had to get straight to the point. "You said the observatory would be named after me, did you not?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"What do you mean?"

"Because of the discovery I made or because I was burned at the stake for not renouncing it?"

"For both those things, although considerably more for the act of sacrifice. You must understand, in the age you just visited your discovery has only historical sig-



nificance. It has not been refuted, but it is secondary, minor. Almost forgotten. As you have seen, things have advanced much farther. But your burning will not have been forgotten.”

From somewhere in the heart of the monastery came the sound of heavy footsteps. It wasn't just two guards this time. A larger group was approaching along the corridors.

“Does that mean I have no choice?” the prisoner asked. “If the observatory is named after me because I was burned at the stake, then it necessarily follows that there is no way I can avoid that fate. But I can still do it. I still have free will. They're coming! What if I agree when they order me to renounce my discovery? That would spare me from the stake, but would change the future, wouldn't it? And the future cannot be changed, I saw it with my own eyes.”

The steps stopped for a moment and he heard in the distance the harsh sound of a barred partition being opened.

“That's right, you can't change what you saw, but only what you saw has been established, and now lies beyond your influence. What you did not see, however, is whether the observatory is named after you.”

The prisoner opened his mouth to say something, but nothing came out. By now his sight had returned, so that in the obscure light of dawn pouring in from the high window he could make out the contours of his visitor. His head was somehow elongated, as if he were wearing a tall hat.

“No, I did not deceive you, if that's what you're thinking,” he continued. “The observatory really will be named after you if you are burned at the stake. But if you are not, it will be named after someone else. Perhaps a student of yours, who will prove to be braver than his master. There is no predestination. Your free will determines what will happen. You will choose between a horrible death in flames and the life of a penitent Astronomer Royal under the wing of the Church. Your comfort will only be disturbed by the scorn of a handful of students, and perhaps a guilty conscience. You must choose between paying the price of satisfying your own conceit, and the wise insight that it makes no real difference whose name they attach to the observatory. It is not an easy choice, and I certainly don't envy you.”

The rumbling steps stopped outside the cell door and a key was thrust into the massive lock.

“You know what I will decide,” the prisoner whispered hurriedly. It was more a statement than a question.

“I know,” the gentle voice answered. “You do not. You will soon, but not yet.”

The rusty hinges screeched sharply and into the small cell came a large turnkey carrying a torch. He was followed by two Interrogators of the Inquisition in the purple robes of their high ecclesiastical calling, while a soldier, also holding a torch, completed the party. There was no more room inside so the three remaining soldiers had to wait in the corridor.

In the smoky light the prisoner squinted hard at the figure on the bed across from him. The strange object on

his head was some sort of wide-brimmed, cylindrical hat, and its slanted shadow completely hid the man's face.

He had not expected his visitor to stay there. Would the others be able to see him? But as no one paid any attention to him, he must be invisible. In other circumstances that would have dumbfounded the prisoner, but after his recent experience he accepted it as quite natural.

“Lazar,” said the first priest, addressing him in an official tone, “this is the last time you will be asked: do you renounce your heresy and penitently accept the teachings of our Holy Mother the Church?”

The prisoner did not take his eyes off the figure in black, but it had turned into a statue. It sat with head bowed, silent, like an old man who has fallen asleep, his white hands clasped to the top of his cane. He seemed indifferent, as if none of this had anything to do with him, and had quite failed to arouse his curiosity. The silence grew heavy and tense with expectation.

At last the Astronomer Royal slowly turned towards the inquisitors and gave his monosyllabic answer.

### Translated by Mary Copple-Tosic

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**Zoran Zivkovic** (born 1948) is a citizen of Yugoslavia who has worked for many years as a publisher, translator and writer. His debut novel, *The Fourth Circle*, appeared in 1993, but none of his fiction has been published hitherto in English translation. When we accepted the above story from him, in early April 1999, bombs were falling on parts of his home city, Belgrade. He sent the following e-mail at that time:

“Let me quote a graffito that summarizes the situation now in Belgrade: ‘In the sky NATO, on the ground Milosevic!’ So, what's the choice? There is none, I'm afraid. No party to this conflict can withdraw now – NATO because it simply can't permit itself to be defeated by a small Balkan dictator; and the dictator because he has no alternative: all the bridges behind him are already destroyed. And in the middle there are hostages: my kids, my wife, myself and many, many more like us. The fact that we are under heavy bombardment every night is by no means the worst thing, although the other night I saw with my own eyes a fleet of Tomahawks flying low, just above my head, on their way to hit the Ministry of Interior Affairs. What really horrifies me is the sheer lack of perspective. This war will go on for a long time, we will experience all kinds of sufferings. Most of us were quite aware of the horrible situation of the Kosovo civilians, but what could we have done about it? Openly protest against it? We did that, of course, risking a lot along the way, but it was completely useless. We had no real power to stop it, and those who did were reluctant to act. Now, the price will be paid by those who are as innocent as the humble souls who are running away from Kosovo. However, I try not to think in the long term. My only concern these days is short-term survival. So far, we have almost everything except gasoline; but the situation will deteriorate with increasing speed. I'll try to stay in touch as long as this communication channel is open.”

Last we heard, Zoran and his family were still well. The above story, first published in Serbo-Croat in 1997, is the opening part of a four-story set of “variations,” collectively entitled *Time Gifts*, which has been accepted for English-language publication by an American university press in Spring 2000. Our thanks to Susan Harris of Northwestern University Press – and to Chris Gilmore for polishing the translation and for bringing it to our attention in the first place.



# Up from Texas

**Patricia Anthony**

*interviewed by*

*Jayme Lynn Blaschke*

Photo: Milton Hinnant

Texan writer Patricia Anthony emerged in the early 1990s as one of the most distinctive new voices in science fiction. From her debut novel, *Cold Allies* (1992), Anthony consistently earned wide acclaim for creating extraterrestrials that were truly alien. Her 1995 novel, *Happy Policeman*, was a finalist for the Arthur C. Clarke Award, and her earlier *Brother Termite* (1993) is poised to be adapted for the silver screen. Anthony has tested the boundaries of the genre with recent works, the critically-praised *God's Fires* and *Flanders*, efforts that are earning her more and more attention from the mainstream.

Your novel *Brother Termite* is one of the projects currently on Titanic director James Cameron's desk. Now Cameron is a director known for his fantastic films, but *Termite* is not exactly the sort of story you'd normally expect Hollywood to jump on, is it?

No, but I think they're going to do a really good job on it. I'll admit when I heard they were going to make it, I immediately thought "Oh, well they're not going to make my book."

You can't make my book. It's too hard. It wouldn't make sense to anybody. And to tell you the truth, the first thing I said when I heard James Cameron wanted to make the film was, "Who's James Cameron?" I don't go to movies a lot, okay? My agent said, "Well, he did *True Lies*." I saw *True Lies*, so that was pretty cool, but I couldn't see how the same person who did that would be interested in *Brother Termite*. And then I called a friend of mine who knows more about movies, and she started saying he did *Terminator* and he did *Aliens*. So now it's starting to make a little bit more sense to me, although really, looking at those movies – this was before I saw *Strange Days* – I was so puzzled. I enjoyed those movies, don't get me wrong, and there was a lot of good characterization in those movies, but when I look at those movies and I look at *Brother Termite*, I'm thinking those movies are basically commercial. They're linear. Those movies make sense. They go from point A to point B. Now he's bought this thing which is basically a political thriller, but it's also satire, plus it's got aliens in it and science fiction, and it's also a romance. What in the world is he

going to do with this? So I figured no, no, no, he's not going to make this movie.

So why then did Cameron pick out *Brother Termite*?

After the contracts were signed and everything and I got the press release from Lightstorm, I finally saw what Jim Cameron had to say about it. What interested him were the characters, and the fact that Reen and the other Cousins are very empathetic characters. You really like them, but at the same time, they're doing something really godawful. There's that sense of tension in the whole book. When I read the screenplay – just the first draft of the screenplay – Reen was definitely Reen.

It's not too often you have a book or movie where the protagonist is also a member of a genocidal race intent on bringing about the extinction of humanity.

Right. And make 'em nice! I don't know why I do that, but it's like in *God's Fires*, where the protagonist is an inquisitor. He's a nice guy. You like

Pessoa. He really doesn't want to burn anybody. He doesn't want to hurt anybody, but in the end he kinda has to toe the line. You get a dichotomy going if you have basically a good person, who is given a horrific duty. I mean, I really get into that. That's fun. That's good drama.

*James Cameron's produced more than his share of blockbusters, but you weren't exactly thrilled when you first got the contract in the mail, were you?*

It was real scary. Months and months went by and I did not hear a single word, and then to get this huge contract in the mail... I mean it just went on and on and on. Of course, I only got to page two, and I'm already signing my life away. So I didn't sign the contract immediately. I waited a week, and I freaked. Remember, I only read the first two pages. When I took that contract out of the envelope, my eyes riveted on the option amount, and I'd been expecting maybe we'll get five, ten thousand tops, and it was quite a bit more. When I saw that I realized they were indeed serious, but the first two pages had scared me to death. They could change the title, they could change *anything*, and all for this X amount they offered in the option clause. I didn't talk to anyone but my very closest friends, and I told them, "I'm not going to sign. I'm going to tear it up. I don't need this." Finally, I was telling my decision to a friend of mine who was a screenwriter. I had to go to her because nobody else knew anything about screenwriting. And I said, "I've made the decision, I'm going to call my agent and tell her I'm not going to sign the contract. I cannot sign my future writing life away, and the perception of my books as a whole for X amount of dollars," and I quoted the option amount. And she said "Well, yes, I understand where you're coming from, but what's the actual purchase price?" Huh? "If they're going to make the movie, they've got to purchase the full rights, so what's that price?" I said, "Oh... page three." So I get page three and I'm reading and there's this long silence, and then I say "Nevermind."

*So you haven't had any problems since then, letting these other people take your baby away?*

I've never looked at it like these books are my children. When I signed the contract, I made the decision that it's Lightstorm's movie. Whatever they want to do, it is their movie. My novel rights are protected, and that's what I was worried about. And so I was just fine with it after the decision. When all the paperwork was in, working

*"We really believed  
that we,  
as Americans,  
could remake  
the world and  
make it better"*

with Lightstorm was terrific. They were so nice. James Cameron said in order to do this screenplay, there was only one person who could do it right, and that was John Sayles. And I've been a John Sayles fan all my life.

*Sayles has quite a varied body of work, doesn't he? It's hard to believe the same man that did The Secret of Roan Innish and Lone Star also gave us Battle Beyond the Stars, Mimic and Piranha.*

He does really wonderful screenplays. He said he was going to do *Brother Termite* because, in essence, he refuses to do a screenplay that he doesn't think is going to be a terrific movie. He apparently really liked the story. He's done a great job. I've had a lot of people asked me, "Didn't you want to do the screenplay?" No. It's not my concept. My concept is for the printed word, and that's what I paint with. I don't have the least notion of how to take something and put it into a screenplay. I'll tell you what was really weird – he did a new scene. He added a scene which I'm particularly fond of, which did not occur in the book, but probably *should* have occurred in the book. It works so well. Who knows if this is going to show up in the final version? But I hope it does. It's a wonderful little scene. So, I'm really happy with the whole experience. I had determined early on that no matter what, I was going to be their biggest supporter. Now, I find that it's really easy. I look at what

he's doing and I admire what he's doing. It's quite neat.

*That's one of your earlier works, but you've developed quite a body of work since then. After Brother Termite, you wrote Conscience of the Beagle, which was well-received. Your fourth book, Happy Policeman, was shortlisted for the Arthur C. Clarke Award.*

Yes, that thrilled me no end.

*But you've struggled to maintain a presence in Britain since then. That's surprising, considering the attention your work had been getting.*

In essence, I feel there's a problem in Great Britain with the perception of science fiction, and I think it's possibly the same problem encountered in Japan, which is that science fiction, by and large, is viewed as an adolescent type of literature. They do have some really good writers over there, but all in all, from what little I've seen, if you're doing something which is a little more literary in nature, it's going to be lost to a lot of – not the British audience, but the British publishers. You understand? It's the marketing, and I don't think they know how to market the books. So when *Happy Policeman* and *Brother Termite* came out, they were marketed with Magic Eye covers. I'm not sure what the reception is in Great Britain, but basically if you market a Magic Eye cover here in the States, who you're appealing to are seventh graders. You're targeting a very young audience. I have some teenagers who read my work, but I don't appeal to the great mass of teenagers. *Cold Allies* did okay, but then when the other two came out, man, they sank big time. I've been selling well in the other countries overseas, but that was unfortunate with Great Britain.

*But you're hoping Flanders breaks you back into that market?*

I hope so. *Flanders* was bought as mainstream fiction by Black Swan, and the publication date is June '99. The British version of *Flanders* is strikingly beautiful. Although most readers don't notice much except the cover, I've become a fan of good design and clean, easy-to-read and era-appropriate font. We readers may not have the luxury of the printed book for too much longer; and there is an art which goes into a beautiful book. Black Swan does an outstanding job.

*Flanders has already turned a lot of heads. It's a new direction for you – no aliens, and not science fiction by any*



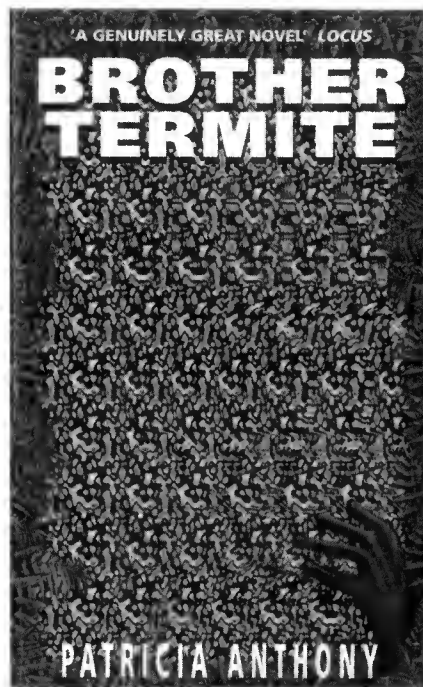
*stretch of the imagination. It has a distinct fantasy flavour, but it's being praised by the mainstream. Both Publisher's Weekly and the San Francisco Chronicle listed it as one of the year's best for 1998.*

*Flanders* is a World War I book about a young Texas boy who joins the British army in 1916. The British sub agents really loved this book, to my surprise. I thought for sure I'd screw it up. I knew I couldn't go at it from a British viewpoint. I've never lived in England, and I cannot do a book from a British viewpoint. So I opted to do this Texas boy who goes over there, and so you're looking at this society, and looking at the way this society works from the outside. And that I can do, because I've been there. I've known Brits and I know the differences, and they always say write what you know, and that's what I knew: looking at the society of Great Britain from the outside. It's my first book that is not science fiction at all. There's a fantasy element, but you can read this book as a historical novel, because you really don't know if the fantasy is real. But Travis Lee Stanhope, the protagonist, is writing home to his brother, and at one point he begins to dream about his dead comrades. He comes to believe that he's dreaming about their ghosts.

*World War I has pretty much become this century's overlooked war. Why did you choose it, specifically, instead of say, World War II?*

The book is about a whole lot of things, but basically it's about death. And what better way to talk about death than World War I? That's why I chose it. If you're going to talk about death, and shove the reader's face in it, this was the most horrible, most oppressive death possible, because you couldn't get out of it in World War I. It was all around you. It was in your food. When they dug the trenches they dug through the bones of the French and the British and the Germans who had died there. It was the most godawful thing in the world. And of course, he starts in 1916, and they've already been through a lot of bad war. I wanted to do that, and then I wanted to show the other side of death.

*Even though this is a new direction you're taking, the themes you're dealing with were present in your previous books. God's Fires focused on religion, and even back in Brother Termite there were the Karma sellers. Seems like you're taking morality and religion another step and examining them more overtly now.*



Yeah, I parodied the Karma sellers. That was a sendup, but I made fun of everybody in that book. Today I'm very Zen, very, very Zen, and have been for many years. But I also picked up some tenets of spiritualism, and you'll see that a lot. I had a lot of fun making fun of it, and making fun of reincarnation. But these are my basic beliefs. When you do a parody or satire, you've got to make fun of everything. I make fun of everything and, hell, I've made fun of President Kennedy, and he was one of my idols. So today, yes I am getting into more questions of religion and particularly death and the subject



of death. It's something I've really always been interested in, and you see that too all through the novels. I really don't do heroes and villains, because I don't believe there are heroes and villains. Yes, there are people who do horrible things. Sometimes there're really good people who do horrible things. That's another problem the average reader has. People look for heroes and villains, and I have a very nebulous sense of what right and wrong is. Which is kind of dangerous and threatening.

*You taught English literature in Portugal in the late 1960s, early 1970s. You saw a lot of those horrible things first hand when you got involved in the Portuguese resistance movement.*

Well, not really *involved*. It was very innocent. It was the very tag end of the '60s and we really believed that we, as Americans, could remake the world and make it better. And the Portuguese students were really caught up in that. I was lucky in that none of my students were arrested. I mean, we'd get invited to their meetings and we'd go in – bless their hearts – and they'd sing "We Shall Overcome." That's what it was. They did not ever talk about violent revolution or overthrowing the government violently. One thing that was really interesting about that revolution – which was bloodless – was an incident that occurred when the soldiers had been sent out to guard a weapons depot. These soldiers were in the front with their automatic rifles, fully armed, and a crowd of civilians was coming up – a mob, really – armed with sticks. The old French Revolution type thing, picture that, coming up along the street, heading for that weapons depot. The commanding officer of this small group of soldiers knew he had two choices. He could either open fire and kill a bunch of them, which was his duty, or they could turn around and walk off and let the crowd have the weapons depot. What do you think an American would've done? But the Portuguese officer turned around and walked off, and ordered his men to stand down. And they left. That's the difference between the two cultures.

*You're just a magnet for world events, aren't you? You're also one of the few people alive to see a nuclear explosion – outside of a testing site, that is. Not many people even know that happened. San Antonio, Texas, I believe it was?*

This wasn't a nuclear test – it was a screwup. I was a senior in 1964 at Robert E. Lee High School in San Antonio. All of the sudden, something

changed. I don't know what it was, maybe I felt the vibrations. There were these big glass-and-steel doors to the outside, and all of the sudden these big door were flying open. I'm assuming the ground was vibrating, that's what was happening. It was just like a movie. There was this really, really tall mushroom cloud off in the distance. Now, any kind of explosion will make a mushroom cloud, but this was huge. I was on the north side of San Antonio and this was happening at Kelly Field way on the south side. The first reports over the radio was that it was a nuclear strike, Russian or whatever, and then there was a rumour going around that one of the nuclear warheads on a B-52 had accidentally been dropped. But I knew that wasn't the case, because I hadn't seen a flash. There was no light to it. The cloud was very dirty. It was an explosion from very deep underground. It was a nuclear storage facility – they had several of them out there – and fission occurred. I don't know why, but fission occurred and there it went. And if the wind had been different, if the wind hadn't been just right, all of that cloud could've come down over the city. It's interesting to me that those of us who were there remember it. It was in our local papers and on the local television news, but it never made the national news and has not since. It's not widely known. I've lived through that, and I've gone through an emergency landing on a plane, I've been struck by lightning. I've even seen ball lightning. *That* was cool.

*Not many people have ever seen ball lightning. Some scientists argue it doesn't even exist.*

I know, and it was great. I was in Brazil and it was a terrible, terrible storm, just the worst godawful storm I've ever seen. In fact, it was so bad that in the interior, to the south of us, that was the location of the hydroelectric plant, and it knocked out the hydroelectric plant. I mean, took it down. It drowned a whole lot of people along that river valley. But all of the sudden my ex-husband calls out "There's a UFO!" and so naturally I run down the stairs. We had huge, two-storey windows. It was a magnificent house on an old coffee plantation on the side of the mountain. I'm looking through the thick trees in front, and here's this ball. It was the size of a beach ball, and it was fire. It was so cool. It was orange, and it was floating. The wind was blowing very strong, but it could float against the wind, and it just meandered around the trees. I said "That's not a UFO. My god, that's ball lightning!" Our

neighbour, the next day, he told us that he'd been in his house and this orange ball rolled through the wall as he was watching TV – oh, bad, bad news. It rolled right over and hit the TV and *ppft!*, electricity went out in the house.

*You're pretty lucky to come away from that one unscathed.*

I've got a thing about lightning. I don't know why, but it's struck me, it's struck my car. That was the same night as the ball lightning. It was so horrific. The windows we had were wrought iron, so we were living in a lightning-attracting place. I'm sitting downstairs and I hear the clap. I know what it is. This blue streak has struck the house, and it was following the electrical lines. We had stone walls, granite walls inside and out, but you could see it following in a grid pattern through the stone down where the electrical lines were running, up to the light switch. It hit the light switch and *ppft!*, flames went this high up. Luckily, it was all stone, but the lights were definitely out in the house. We were out of electricity for a week, and when the electricity finally came back up, everything in the house was polarized. It's direct current in Brazil, so for some reason this lightning strike polarized the whole electrical system. You couldn't touch the refrigerator without getting shocked. Any kind of electric appliance would shock you, so we had to tie copper wire around every electrical appliance we had and lead the copper wire out and bury it in the ground. It was a hoot! It was a real hoot!



*You have a close relationship with your readers. As writers go, you're fairly accessible. You attend conventions often and teach a writing class at Southern Methodist University. You really do a lot of mentoring, don't you?*

Roxanne Longstreet-Conrad – who is also a wonderful writer and a brilliant designer – got me a website, and it's at [www.patriciaanthony.com](http://www.patriciaanthony.com). And she's always tinkering on it. It's pretty interactive. Writers can post their good news, and I give writing tips. A lot of what I'm interested in is mentoring, which is why I teach creative writing at SMU. It took me from 1980 to 1987 to sell my first short story, and I didn't sell my first novel until 1992. That's a long damn time, and you get discouraged and it gets real tough. I've always wanted to be able to teach prospective writers so that they didn't make the stupid mistakes that I made. I made a lot of dumb mistakes about writing by not understanding the craft, going at it without having any feedback. I'm what I call an organic writer. Which means I don't outline. I go in with kind of a vague story idea. I don't know what's coming out.

*Many writers swear by their outlines, and can't write unless the whole plot is sketched out in advance. Still, there are a lot of writers like you that work without a net, as it were. Has your approach to the craft ever taken you to unexpected places?*

There was a kid who had bought *Cold Allies*, and he had gotten into the first three chapters and was really excited. He looked up my telephone number and called me, and we had this great conversation. He was really excited about the book, and I said I hoped he enjoyed it, and to let me know what he thought about it when he finished. Well, he called me again, like at 11 o'clock one night. I'd already gone to bed and I'm like, "Who the hell is this?" And he's going, "They left! They left! The aliens left! You never told me what they were doing." I went back and went over the book with him, and showed him the reasons. I said, "They left because that's the way they were." In essence, meeting those aliens was like being run over with a steamroller. They didn't have to tell you what they were here for. We can't know, because they're *so damn alien*. There's no way to make any sense of what they did. There's only an Epiphany sort of sense and a question they leave in the mind. That's the essence of the aliens. And see, I'd never understood that until I had to explain it to the kid. He thought about it, then said "Okay... Okay!" So I think that when the stuff comes up in yourself, you should let it flow. **12**

If nothing else, the authors of *The Faculty*'s body-snatchers-in-high-school premise have the gift of perfect pitch. (Still available: *Die Hard* on the space station; *Watership Down* with gut flora; *Regarding Henry* with decapitation... No, no, you show me the bank draft, *then* we talk.) It's dubitable how many more times Kevin Williamson, to whom the actual screenplay was farmed, can pull his postmodern-teenflick routine; but at least *The Faculty* does aspire to be more science-fictional and bookish than either of his *Scream* scripts. And while the relentless genre self-reference is getting pretty tiresome and onanistic (A: "Usually this is the point where someone says 'Let's get the fuck out of here!'" B: "Let's get the fuck out of here!"), it's pleasing that the in-genre references are not this time to teen horror movies but to classic mid-century sf novels.

In fact, the one radical idea in this otherwise staggeringly conservative protreptic (v. below) is that humanity's future rests with sf readers. "What're you reading?" asks the new girl of gothic loner Clea Duvall: "*Double Star*, Robert Heinlein? Are you one of those science fiction people?" I didn't quite get why *Double Star* in particular, but Duvall's Heinlein expertise turns out the vital key to the vexing problem of where the pods are if school really has been invaded by body snatchers: "Jack Finney's *The Body Snatchers* is a blatant ripoff from Robert Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters*... In *Puppet Masters*, they were parasites." Pull back on reactions showing penny drop; and, cut.

But here's a strange thing. Despite the title, and despite the way the trailers have consistently spun the teachers-as-pod-people angle, the main species barrier in *The Faculty* is not that between teachers and teens, but between real people and zombies among the ranks of the pupils themselves. No sympathy is spared for fellow-students sheeplike enough to allow themselves to be implanted with hive-mind alien parasites; yet most of the staff emerge from the experience not merely unscathed but redeemed, humanized, and even sexually accessible — at least for the boy brainiac who finally finds happiness with his shy bespectacled English teacher, presumably because his genius mind is the only one sharp enough to recognize her as the ubiquitously superbabetastic Famke Janssen in unconvincing Clark Kent glasses.

Evidently, there's a line in the sand beyond which even Hollywood's most po-mo may not pass. For all its deconstructive retroflexions, *The Faculty* is completely unambivalent about the absolute value of studying hard, going

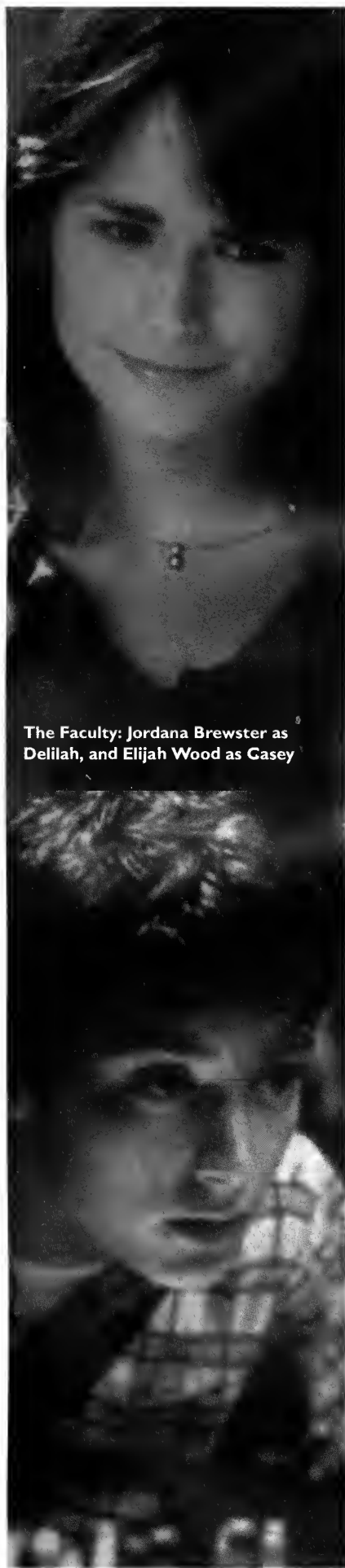


Pleasantville: ...the b&w lucid-dreamland of a fictitious 50s smalltown soap...

# MUTANT POPCORN

Nick Lowe





The Faculty: Jordana Brewster as Delilah, and Elijah Wood as Casey

to college, monogamous heterosexual bonding with a nice young person with healthy aspirations, and resisting all the realities of teendom like generalized anomie, alienation from authority, peer pressurization, and self-image anxiety. Though sold as an invitation to view elders as aliens, it's far more ambivalent about its own target constituency, and ruthlessly insistent on the importance of being what sensible adults want you to be.

On these terms, it's not at all bad at what it does. If you didn't know, you'd scarcely guess it was Robert Rodriguez directing, and though the young actors are generally good, the large and interesting teacher cast are mostly rather thrown away (Janssen, Piper Laurie, and especially Salma Hayek are just big cameos). But with considerable deftness the first act assembles a breakfast-club cast of half-a-dozen misfits and outsiders, who in their different ways aspire to something more than conformity and popularity, and manage to assert their individuality sufficiently to evade the zombification of their entire peer group. Conveniently, they number three boys and three girls, and the alleged dyke isn't, so that the pack is at once able to start shuffling into "unlikely" romantic recombinations (preening cheerleader with geeky Elijah Wood, soppy new girl with dope-dealing renegade, star quarterback with friendless Heinlein fan).

Needless to say, each of our heroes carries a telltale mark that distinguishes the saved from the damned. The bullied Wood is a potential star athlete; the cheerleader is brainy, literate and journalistically-minded; the quarterback chooses college over touchdowns; and even the drug dealer is a secretly clean-living chem wizard and swot, and the only hits he peddles are fun-but-harmless home brew ("mostly caffeine and some other household shit"). Instead, it's the experience of having prawns from space infiltrate your nervous system that's dressed up in druggy invitations: "It's so much better," says the killer-queen alien to Wood in his last temptation. "There's no fear or pain. It'll be beautiful. You'll be beautiful." Luckily for us all he's cool enough to say no.

To look at, *Pleasantville* comes from an altogether more uptown and aspiring neighbourhood, but they're siblings under the skin. *The Faculty*'s Wood and *Pleasantville*'s Tobey Maguire are lookalike actors playing near-identical characters undergoing the same progression from high-school zero to hero, winning final approval by the lead-babe heroine in the magic words that Holly-

wood believes all adolescent males long to hear. (*The Faculty*: "You know, you can be pretty cool sometimes." *Pleasantville*: "You've turned into a pretty cool guy.") Neither's plot makes any more sense than it can be bothered to, with genre shorthands quite openly taking the place of anything resembling Aristotelian causality; the principal difference is that *The Faculty* is tight, fast, and focused, while *Pleasantville* is just all over the place.

Less a competitor to *The Truman Show* and *EdTV* than an inside-out variation on *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, *Pleasantville* has geeky Maguire and trampy sister Reese Witherspoon catapulted into the b&w lucid-dreamland of a fictitious 50s smalltown soap, which they proceed to corrupt and colorize with their sinful 90s ways. Viewers will reach their own verdict on whether the soft, silly satire on 50s TV values belongs in the same movie as the very belated attempt at something harder, as the town's campaign to preserve its innocence slips into "No Coloreds," book-burnings, mob justice and show trials. But even on its own terms it's a remarkably sloppy film. For a veteran screenwriter like Gary Ross, there are some surprisingly amateurish bits of plotting: "it's ok, he's not in there" when Jeff Daniels' diner is trashed by the mob (but where was he? we never find out); the clumsy multiplication of public meetings in the final act, while our heroes just sit around listening to coloured music; dad wandering forlornly round the darkened house shouting "Hi Honey, I'm home!", while in an intercut strand his daughter is actually upstairs the whole time with the lights on, losing her intellectual virginity to D. H. Lawrence.

One could plead that *Pleasantville* only asks to be judged as a satirical fable; but it's none too clear what the *Pleasantville* TV show is modelled on, or why our hero is addicted to it, and the storylines cited don't sound much like real TV soap episode plots of any vintage, however antelapsarian. In any case, like *The Faculty*, the satire is ultimately toothless. All the targets are soft, whether they're extinct TV cultures or period political issues; despite Maguire's courthouse-finale trumpeting of "things that are silly, or sexy, or dangerous," there's precious little in the smugly presentist *Pleasantville* that seems anything but the first of these in the 90s, unless it's the suggestion that only in the imaginary 50s could a teenage blonde choose college over airhead posing and promiscuity. At the end of the movie, everyone turns coloured, which may conveniently defuse the segregationist movement in *Pleasantville*, but hardly

translates into much of a real-world solution. Even its literary canon is remarkably conservative: *Moby Dick* and *Huck Finn* (though not Joyce or Henry Miller) are triumphantly reclaimed alongside *Catcher in the Rye*, but even after the coloured revolution nobody is reading Kerouac, Mailer, Burroughs, and certainly none of that dreadful Robert Heinlein. Parasites from space, indeed! As well claim that *The Puppet Masters* said more about the ideological climate and contradictions of the American 50s than anything in this feather-weight fluff, and without any of that amusing postmodern irony that shows how far our civilization has advanced in the half-century since.

Surprisingly, the season's most complex and thoughtful reflection on tarnished innocence comes in a kiddie film from the very corporation that built its own Pleasantville (the picket-fence Disney utopia of Celebration, FLA) in America's green and pleasant land. ***Mighty Joe [Young]*** (the prints retain the surname supposedly stripped for the UK release) originates in one of the earliest Hollywood attempts at deliberate repositioning, Schoedsack and Cooper's sentimental palimpsest of their own *King Kong* for a junior audience. But Ron Underwood's accomplished eco-allegorical remake is something of a manifesto for the Disney Way: an affirmation of the possibility of goodness in a system of global capitalism, with innocence preserved and virtue rewarded by the very mechanisms that compete to commodify it. And the arabesques of plot and ideology by which this outcome is achieved have the balletic fascination of pre-Copernican planetology – not least because it's apparent from the start that this movie has *no conceivable ending*.

Consider. In Underwood's version the mighty Joe, titan of the rainforest, is a personified embodiment of the third-world natural resources over which western interests tussle, and the plot develops an extensive menu of subtly-differentiated outcomes, graded in degrees of unhappiness. Worst is non-intervention, which will simply throw open the hunt to poachers and entrepreneurs like Rade Serbedzija's leering white hunter, with his Afrikaner accent and villainously huge cigars (probably Cuban). Only a notch or two better is private-enterprise transportation to a zoo, circus, themepark or game reserve, since the dastardly Serbedzija's private reserve in Botswana is actually a front for a global entrepôt in CITES violations. Roving cryptozoologist Bill Paxton is able to argue that publicly-funded versions adminis-

tered by well-intentioned scientists are at least preferable to private solutions; but *we* all know it's bound to end in tears, mayhem, and a giant pongid rampaging down the Boulevard, up Graumann's Chinese Theater, and over the Hollywood sign.

So where on earth *can* Joe find the freedom he craves in a fallen world where nothing is free? Well, if you think this is impossible you're living in a world that isn't the movies. It gives little away to give away the ending: so touched is the American public by Joe's heroic kid-Kong finale that they stump up the cash by private subscription for Joe's home forest to be purchased outright as a wildlife reserve from the government of, erm, whatever central African country this is supposed to be set in. In other words, the one institution of capitalism that attaches no strings to the gift of vast sums of money is, bless us, the one that sustains the entertainment industry itself: ordinary men and women and (conspicuously) kids, paying out their pocket money as an act of selfless giving in return for nothing more than the glow of having their hearts warmed and the things they love protected.

For what saves Joe from the evils of

capitalism is that he lives in a strictly-certified Disney world. To be sure, *Mighty Joe* delicately recognizes the possibility of original sin, at least to the extent that anyone who looks like Charlize Theron has to be raised by gorillas in the Muwenzori to hang on to her virginity. (There's a pervasive cross-identification between Joe and his keeper, who lose their moms on the same tear-jerking night, and somehow develop to adulthood together in the jungle, a breezy "Twelve Years Later" eliding all questions about how.) Nevertheless, death and disablement are all but banished; only two characters – three if you count great apes – are killed in the entire movie, in both cases bloodlessly, and though you hear some legs getting crushed when Joe runs amok at the benefit party, that's just comedy. It's no accident that Joe is so very careful to avoid any reference to actual geography, when the Swahili-phone setting seems to place it firmly in southwestern Uganda, southeastern Zaire, or Rwanda – all of whose unpenetrated highland rainforests are mainly famous for harbouring rather darker secrets than cuddly 20-foot primates. Accompanying adults may well ponder how our heroes will avoid being macheted to death by roving Interahamwe death squads on day three of their newfound freedom; but this is Disney Africa, where the milk-drinking races stay magically clean and anamoebic, and even the mosquitoes have lost the taste for blood.

If you can bear with all this, it's a remarkably well-made movie, resisting all the easy temptations of adult knowingness and humour to play its material absolutely straight. No heart-string is left unbowed, with able help from a huge sloshy James Horner score with its gruesomely memorable main theme; and Theron is drop-dead disarming as the untamed jungle virgin bounding innocently around in tropical hotpants. Underwood, normally a director with a tongue-shaped bulge in his cheek, seems to be making a point of showing off his skill at delivering all the hoariest clichés in the manual without a blink: the tear-blinking deathbed promise to take care of the orphan; the converging lips interrupted by bleeping pager; the lingering "don't leave me" scene culminating in triumphant resurrection ("You big palooka!" chides Paxton at the quickening). There are too many explosions and not nearly enough jokes, but *Mighty Joe* seems nervous that anything else might be too much like postmodern irony; and those pleasant people at Disney understand that our young people have had quite enough of that, thank you very much.

Nick Lowe



Mighty Joe Young: Bill Paxton plays Greg O'Hara

## ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

A correspondent notes that while the BBC website poll's choice of Iain Banks as fifth-greatest writer of the millennium is mildly surprising, it could have been worse. The similar Random House (US) poll for best novels of the 20th century ended up with a top ten containing four books by Ayn Rand, and three by L. Ron Hubbard...

## THE UNSTRUNG HARP

**Lee Falk** (1905-1999), creator of the comic strips *The Phantom* and *Man-Drake the Magician*, died in Manhattan on 13 March.

**Mary Gentle** was briefly rumoured (on Internet, where else?) to have died. Having felt herself carefully all over, she believes this is incorrect.

**Carl Johan Holzhhausen** (1900-1999), notable Swedish sf/fantasy author and translator, died in March aged 99. Embarrassingly, various sources including Sam J. Lundwall's bibliography of Swedish sf and the *SF Encyclopedia* Addenda had in recent years anticipated this by listing Holzhhausen as dying in 1989.

**Josh Kirby**, interrogated about certain 1960s cover paintings credited to "Ron Kirby," broke down and confessed to having been born Ronald William Kirby. Whence the nickname? "When I was at Art School, some wag thought I painted like Sir Joshua Reynolds!"

**Stanley Kubrick** (1928-1999) died unexpectedly on 8 March, aged 70. It's hard to add anything to mass-media coverage of the reclusive celebrity director who gave us *Dr Strangelove*, 2001, *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Shining*. Presumably it is now unlikely that we'll ever see *AI*, his future robots-and-global-warming film project distantly based on Brian Aldiss's "Super-Toys Last All Summer Long" – on whose screenplay Aldiss, the late Bob Shaw and Ian Watson

had all worked and suffered varying degrees of unquotable frustration.

**Michael Moorcock** and **Iain Sinclair** speaking in concert were a sufficient attraction to draw nearly 100 people (including such luminaries as Robert Holdstock and Chris Evans) to the remote fastness of Dulwich library on 25 March. Unfortunately, after a long embarrassing wait, a certain lack of either Moorcock or Sinclair caused the meeting to disperse to the pub – pursued by a highly apologetic librarian.

**Teresa Nielsen Hayden** of Tor Books quoted a sure-fire covering letter designed with great skill to penetrate her editorial defences: "I think you'll find this a cut above the usual crap Tor publishes."

**Terry Pratchett** (about to receive an honorary D.Litt. from the University of Warwick) has nervously stopped reading the net's alt.fan.pratchett newsgroup: "There was so much speculation about future plots and story points, some of which had actually collided with stuff I was planning or, in some cases, had actually written, that it was getting problematical..."

**Fay Weldon**, introducing that recent reprint of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, reckons that Philip K. Dick somehow makes more sense today than he ever did in his own time to mere sf fans: "His fans are not the brightest, but now he has an intellectual following."

## INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

**Awards at Eastercon.** At Reconvene, the 50th British national Easter sf convention, the BSFA Award for best novel of 1998 was presented to Christopher Priest for *The Extremes*. BSFA short-fiction and artwork awards went to Gwyneth Jones's "La Cenerentola" (*IZ* 136) and Jim Burns's painting for *Lord Prestimion* by Robert Silverberg (*IZ* 138 cover). The newly launched Richard Evans memorial award was named for the well-loved editor who died sadly young in 1996, and in John Clute's words is intended to honour "a writer who has published several notable works of fiction over an extended period, but who has enjoyed significantly more critical than commercial success for this accomplishment." Its first – and very appropriate – winner was M. John Harrison. The Eastercon art show award sponsored by Paper Tiger went to Tom Abba.

**Philip K. Dick Award** for best original US paperback: Geoff Ryman's 253: *The Print Remix*.

**Thog's Vorlon Science Masterclass.** Jeffrey Willerth, former Associate Producer of *Babylon 5*, enthuses (in the

official *B5* magazine) about special effects in a space battle: "I'm particularly amazed by the audio, being able to hear a laser blast originate at one end of the screen and travel across to blow something up on the other."

**Fan Feuds.** The unofficial Terry Pratchett fanzine *The Wizard's Knob* grumbles that after bookshops' complaints (of noise, etc), Transworld have "banned" fan outfits from selling stuff to queues at the vast multi-ring-circus events that Pratchett signings have become... Meanwhile, unexpected controversy afflicted 1999's pan-European convention in Dortmund, Germany, when an overly devout group of German Christians threatened to sue the event for being blasphemously named Trinity.

**Gory Awards.** *International Horror Guild Awards*... Novel: Thomas Tessier, *Fog Heart*. First Novel: Caitlin Kiernan, *Silk*; Michael Marano, *Dawn Song*. Collection: John Shirley, *Black Butterflies: A Flock on the Dark Side*. Anthology: Stephen Jones & David Sutton, *Dark Terrors 4*. Long Form: Peter Straub, "Mr Club and Mr Cuff." Short Form: Lucy Taylor, "Dead Blue." Nonfiction: David Pringle (ed.), *St James Guide to Horror, Ghost, & Gothic Writers*... well done, that man! Graphic: *Transmetropolitan: Back on the Street*. Publication: *Hellnotes*. Artist: Edward Gorey. Movie: *Gods and Monsters*. Television: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Additionally, Ray Bradbury was officially declared a "Living Legend."

**Easter 2001** ... Britain's national sf convention will be "Paragon" in Blackpool. SAE for details to 379 Myrtle Road, Sheffield, S2 3HQ.

**Thog's Masterclass.** *Dept of We All Get Mornings Like This*: "Enoch came weeping down the stair, great wracking sobs that shook the banisters and resounded all the way into the breakfast nook, where Carter, Hope, and Chant, still morose at the locking of the Green Door, ate a meal of despair around the claw-footed table, in the form of marmalade, toast, and scrambled eggs." (James Stoddard, *The High House*, 1998)... *Dept of Hard Science*, or how the hero can walk over a Bridge of Light: "Through some subterranean passageway, the hissing, bellowing gas travelled to the chasm; the rocks there were filled with the radio-active ore; the gas was ionized, and as it spouted across the abyss, the molecules, the atoms that had been liquid became electrified ions, solids – countless billions of infinitesimal bits of metal or mineral, moving, to be sure, streaming across the chasm, but under such pressure, so closely packed, that they formed a span as strong and unyielding as solid metal!" (A. Hyatt Verrill, *The Bridge of Light*, 1950)

# Soldier.exe

Tony Ballantyne

```
//  
// Program ver 4.1 Written by Tony Ballantyne 24/11/38  
// Checked by BARBARA class Artificial Intelligence  
// 9/12/38  
// Certified consistent with Company Mission Statement  
// ref RB- 10N 154837
```

```
//  
// for War Robot ver 4.1 or higher (Hoplite class)  
//  
//*****  
/* This source code listing is provided for end users who  
wish to customize the program to their own specification.  
Nakami Applications strongly recommend that any mod-  
ifications are made by advanced users only. Nakami  
Applications cannot be held responsible for any damage  
arising from such modification. */  
//*****
```

```
#include file AUTONOMIC_FUNCTIONS  
#include file COMMON_SENSE //These two files speak  
//for themselves  
#pragma female //This pragma must be set correctly  
//for robot type before compilation.  
//Failure to do so will result in  
//progressive system failure.
```

*// This is the main procedure. It will run first on power up.*

```
PROCEDURE Main()  
set global boolean variable Alive == true  
//The robot is born!  
call procedure License()  
//This is defined later on within this code  
thread.start(System_hard)  
thread.start(System_soft)  
/* These two threads are background processes that  
deal with such things as motor functions, response to  
external stimuli and internal maintenance. */  
  
while (Alive == true) do  
call procedure beliefs()  
call procedure orders()  
call procedure integrity()  
endwhile  
/* The above loop will repeat for the robot's life. It is  
essential that the three procedures are called every pro-  
cess cycle to ensure that the robot's integrity has not been  
compromised. The first procedure loads current policy
```

*and thinking into memory, the second loads current orders and the third checks that both policy and orders are consistent. If they are not then the robot's instruction set has probably been altered by non-aligned forces. The variable Alive is therefore set to false, the loop is exited and the next procedure is called. \*/*

```
call procedure Destructor()  
//This procedure kills the robot  
ENDPROCEDURE Main
```

```
PROCEDURE License()  
/* This procedure checks that the end user has paid for  
the software license. If they have not, the application  
is terminated. Please note; this procedure cannot, for  
obvious reasons, be removed from the source code. */
```

```
if (LICENSE.NotEquals(true)) then set variable Alive  
= = false  
ENDPROCEDURE License
```

```
PROCEDURE Beliefs()  
/* A robot must have a set of beliefs if it is to lead an inde-  
pendent existence. The Beliefs procedure was introduced  
into the War Robot ver 3.0. Earlier version robots tended  
to sit around doing nothing until given specific orders.  
End users may either specify their own set of beliefs or  
rely on the set provided by Nakami Applications. */
```

```
if (Belief == true) then  
MemoryDump (beliefs.dat)  
/* If the end user has provided a beliefs file, the  
MemoryDump method will load the file into the  
robot's short-term memory. */  
Else  
MemoryDump("Free Enterprise Works. Capitalism  
may not be a perfect system, but it is the best we  
have got. We have a duty to our shareholders. I  
believe in freedom of choice")  
//Our standard set of BELIEFS  
endif  
ENDPROCEDURE Beliefs
```

```
PROCEDURE Value(Current_Value)  
/* This procedure is designed to ensure units are not  
placed at risk when their value is at a premium. A  
robot is only allowed to fight if Current_Value is below  
a certain level. This variable is constantly being recal-
```



culated and takes into consideration such factors as the cost of robot maintenance, training, density of war robots in the current theatre of operations, and most importantly, total number of robots available to aligned forces.

If the end user finds themselves in a situation where robot resources are scarce, it is in their interests to increase “manpower,” not waste it. For this reason, we have added the “Reproduction” procedure to this release of the software. (See later in this source code).

We make the observation that, in history, societies have only allowed large number of soldiers to be killed off in wars when they have had the necessary spare “manpower.” Similarly, only sufficiently wealthy societies could attain the agricultural surpluses to feed and support a large army. It goes without saying that, in a modern day context, these are exactly the sort of societies we want to do business with. \*/

```
if (Current_Value >1) then
    Reproduction.priority = 1
    Fight.priority = 0 //Robots are scarce. Make some more.
else
    Fight.priority = 0.8
    Reproduction.priority = 0.2
    //Robots are plentiful. Let them fight.
endif
ENDPROCEDURE Value
```

#### PROCEDURE Reproduction ()

*/\* This procedure is called when the robot has succeeded in interfacing with a non-aligned robot. It is intended to set in motion the process that will result in a copy of this instruction set being imposed on top of the non-aligned robot's current programming, effectively subverting it to the end user's forces. Before it does this, however, it calls the procedure License to ensure that the end user can afford to pay to run our software on a new robot. If the end user cannot or will not pay for the license, an upgrade option is offered. This allows the end user to transfer his license to the new robot, (it may be a better model, for example), whilst terminating the license on the old robot.*

*Please note; this license checking procedure cannot, for obvious reasons, be removed from the source code. \*/*

```
if (license.new == true) then
    Copy (this) *. new_robot *.
    //Copy the instruction set across
else if (license.upgrade == true) then
    Copy (this) *. new_robot *.
    Set variable Alive = false
    /* Copy the instruction set to the new robot, kill off
    the old robot */
else
    Reproduction.priority = 0
    //No point reproducing if the end user won't pay
    for licenses
endif
ENDPROCEDURE Reproduction
```

#### PROCEDURE Fight(Current\_Target)

*/\* Modern day engagements mean that units are very rarely called upon to fight. Units are more generally used for surveillance, decoy and logistic purposes, nevertheless there remains the possibility they will find themselves in a position of conflict. The unit will generally be at a disadvantage in these circumstances, indeed it has been calculated that units survive only around 5% of such encounters. \*/*

#### Call Procedure Target(Current\_Target)

*/\* A last check to make sure the target is valid. We don't want to destroy neutral or aligned property, after all. \*/*  
*/\* To adjust the robot to peacetime conditions, simply comment out the following line. \*/*

#### Call Procedure Kill(Current\_Target)

#### ENDPROCEDURE Fight

#### PROCEDURE Target(Current\_Target)

*/\* Modern day theatres of operations are increasingly tangled with non-military activities. For example, a War Robot engaged in industrial espionage may find itself operating in a predominantly civilian context such as a shopping mall.*

*It is also worth noting how wars are increasingly televised: the footage of bombers taking off interspersed with pictures from their intended target is a modern video cliché that began during the Gulf War.*

*It is essential therefore that targets be positively identified to prevent the possibility of lawsuits over damage to property. In matters of extreme importance, it is possible to override this method, however end users are recommended to read Appendix 3 of the documentation – “Warburg GmbH v David Ian Associates” – before doing so. Incorrect kills can be a costly business. \*/*

```
for count = 1 to 3
    Buildings.isValidTarget()
    Transport.isValidTarget()
    Stock.isValidTarget()
endfor
```

*/\* Buildings, transport and stock are valuable commodities. The isValidTarget methods are called three times in order to be absolutely sure that the targets they refer to are valid. \*/*

```
if (Target == LowPriority)
    Personnel.isValidTarget()
endif
```

*/\* The above statement needs some explanation. Why only check if personnel are valid targets if the mission is of low priority? To put it another way, why do we allow the robot to destroy personnel indiscriminately when the mission is of great importance?*

*The reason is as follows: Most humans today have a clause in their company contracts permitting their participation in military engagements on behalf of their employer. Those that refuse the clause will fail to find a permanent post within a company. The unem-*

ployed are rarely in a position to sue the end user for damage or injury.

The if statement can be commented out, of course, ensuring that personnel targets are always checked to see if they are valid, however we have found that there is little need for this in most business contexts. The cost of damages awarded to personnel is relatively small. Including the cost of training, etc., the cost of a damaged robot is invariably greater. \*/

ENDPROCEDURE Target

PROCEDURE Kill(Current\_Target)

*/\* It is anticipated that this procedure will be frequently updated in order to take advantage of improvements in weapon technology. Kill methods can be added at a later date using the AddKill() method (See User Documentation Appendix 4 "Upgrading Your System") \*/*

switch case <Situation()>

*/\* The Situation() method calculates the type, priority and probability of success of the kill. One example: you don't fire bullets at a tank. Another example: the inadvisability of wasting expensive laser-guided missiles weapons on low priority targets such as personnel. \*/*

case <SituationHighest>

Current\_Target.KillwithMissileWeapon()

*/\* Missile weapons of all descriptions are extremely wasteful of resources. As such they are used only when absolutely essential and/or when a kill is guaranteed. Remember, an exploding missile is not only a waste of resources, it can also damage the target itself, possibly permanently. \*/*

case <SituationPersonnelMedium>

Current\_Target.MemoryDump.Garbage()

*/\* This is a very cheap method of disposing of personnel. Nearly everyone employed by a company has a wetware link to allow their brains to interface with the company's computers, so this kill method is usually very effective. The human brain is accessed via the wetware data link and the human memory is overwritten. Both the conscious and unconscious minds are filled with random data, leaving humans without any automatic motor functions. They will not breathe, their hearts will not pump, they will die within minutes. It will not, of course, be of much use against personnel not employed by a company as they will be lacking a wetware link. In this case, the next method may be used. \*/*

case <SituationPersonnelSlow>

Current\_Target.KillwithInsects()

*/\* A very cheap way of disposing of the enemy. It makes use of one of the few natural resources that is not in short supply. (Another such resource is the human being, of course.) There are many variations within this procedure. All of these are handled within the KillwithInsects() method.*

case <SituationCompanyKill>

while (Personnel.nexttgtAsstManager = true)

Personnel.MemoryDump.Garbage()

endwhile

*/\* This procedure is designed to destroy a non-aligned company, or more specifically, send it into a state of hibernation. It does this by overwriting the memories of all personnel within the company above the level of assistant manager.*

*It is an interesting fact that humans are not the driving force behind a company. The business environment has evolved its own set of rules that a company must follow if it is to survive. Even if key personnel are destroyed, other managers following the same company ethos will refill their positions.*

*Within time, the company will emerge from its state of hibernation, ready to continue business. \*/*

ENDPROCEDURE Kill

PROCEDURE Destructor()

*/\* Called when the variable Alive is set to false. This procedure effectively kills the robot and wipes this program from memory to stop it falling into the possession of non-aligned forces. \*/*

MemoryDump("Dear" + <Name> + "Over the past" + <period of time> "you have been the physical container for a set of programs written by Nakami Applications. During that time you have been acting as a War Robot for" + <Allied Forces> + "Any actions that you may have performed during that time are not your responsibility and you cannot be held liable for any damage or injury committed by yourself during that time. (Sees and Mangrave Act 2024). Neither are you entitled to any compensation for damage or injury caused to yourself under the same act.

Nonetheless," + <Allied Forces> + "are willing to offer an ex-gratia payment of" + <payment> + "as a gesture of good will.

It should be realized that in these days of dwindling resources, the cost of producing war robots is increasingly prohibitive. Many of the functions required can be performed by suitably modified human beings at a fraction of the cost. Nakami Applications appreciate the contribution you have made to the global economy and wish you all the best for the future.")

Delete (this) \*.\*

*//Wipes this program from memory*

ENDPROCEDURE Destructor

---

Tony Ballantyne wrote "The Sixth VNM" (IZ 138) and "Gorillagram" (IZ 139). He informs us that another recent story of his appears in *My Weekly Summer Fiction Special* (D. C. Thomson & Co., Dundee, Scotland). So far as we are aware, he is the first writer we have ever published who is also a regular contributor to the Thomson women's story papers – those coelacanths of UK fiction-publishing as we once called them.

# Lifework

Mary Soon Lee

It is 2162 and Kyoko is late for her psychiatrist's appointment. She races down the escalator from the monorail station, trying not to look at the ads. But the images grab at her, holograms warping in the air in front of her, as if she is descending through a tunnel of lights.

The last ad switches from a pastel-coloured vision of two plump models drinking Zipcola to a black-and-white banner: KYOKO WILSON, UN-AMERICAN TRADITIONALIST. On either side of the banner is a rotating portrait of Kyoko.

She shades her face between her hands, but it is no use. Noise swells behind her on the escalator as people notice her.

She drops her hands, and runs the block to the psychiatrist's. Twenty seconds in the elevator, brushing the stray hair back from her face, taking deep breaths.

The office door slides open as she approaches, and Dr Audrey Mitchell looks up from a false-leather armchair and gives a false-sweet smile. The doctor wears a plain cream suit, her hair drawn sternly back from a thin face. The office smells of pine, although they are miles from the nearest forest.

"Good afternoon, Kyoko. Please sit down."

Kyoko perches on the edge of the second armchair. Behind Dr Mitchell's head the Trupicture window shows the Great Pyramid at Giza, recently hollowed out, reinforced, and then filled with 1200 luxury hotel rooms. Dr Mitchell probably selected the view to illustrate progress, but Kyoko calls it desecration.

"You're late again," says Dr Mitchell, her voice perfectly even. "If you wore your node, the system could remind you about your appointments."

"I'm sorry," murmurs Kyoko, though she is not in the least bit sorry. Refusing to wear the node is a small gesture of defiance. Only a small gesture, because as soon as she leaves her apartment, public-area surveillance nodes record her every action anyhow. But lately Kyoko has come to think of her life as a painting, each small gesture forming another brush-stroke. She remembers the Japanese watercolours that hung in her grandparents' apartment, every stroke perfect. Each painting had a name printed beneath it: *Autumn Grasses* or *Mountain Wind*. So far the title of her own painting eludes her. She would like to call it something uplifting,

such as *Hope at Twilight*, but she's not as optimistic as she used to be.

Dr Mitchell unscrolls the computer screen on the table beside her, and makes a note. "Last week, we spoke about marriage as an instrument of oppression, constricting couples to one rigid relationship. Did you review our discussion with your... partner as I suggested?"

Kyoko nods. She and Nicholas have had their psychiatrist appointments on the same day for a year now, and they always talk about them afterwards. At first it was funny, but over the year, the pressure has mounted steadily. She can understand why so many other couples divorced after attending the court-appointed counselling sessions. Kyoko and Nicholas's neighbours won't speak to them any more, and Kyoko knows that her boss would fire her if he could find any legal grounds to do so.

The doctor leans forward and flashes her false-sweet smile again. "Kyoko, I think we made an important breakthrough last meeting. You agreed that when you first met Nicholas, eight years ago, the system might have been able to pick out a more compatible partner for you."

"Yes. I suppose so." Kyoko stares down at the gold wedding-band round her finger, and twists it round and round, as Dr Mitchell twists the words she says. It would be arrogance or ignorance to imagine that the gawky 19-year-old who happened to sit next to her in History 101 was the single man most suited to her. Kyoko doesn't believe in miracles.

"Excellent. Then, with all the myriad resources at its disposal, don't you agree that there is a very good chance that the system could find you a better partner now?"

Kyoko lifts her head. "No, I do not." It is hard for her to tell this coolly confident woman how she feels, but she must speak, or the brush-stroke will fall incorrectly. "It might have been true when I first met Nicholas, but not any more. Nicholas is part of me now. I love him." Her fingers close over the wedding-band, holding it tight, but she does not look away from the doctor.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, Kyoko. The system won't ask you to leave Nicholas unless that's in your best interests. But binding yourself to him artificially helps no one. Marriage is an archaic tradition belonging to a

pre-electronic era where people died young." Dr Mitchell delivers her sermon colourlessly, as if she has given this speech many times before. "If you just let the system help you, it will ensure your happiness for centuries to come."

"I'm happy now," says Kyoko. It comes out more fiercely than she intended.

"But perhaps you could be happier." Dr Mitchell taps one fingernail on the armrest, emphasizing her point. "And it's not just your own future that you are jeopardizing. Social mobility is critical to economic health in a consumer age. Progress demands flexibility."

Behind Dr Mitchell, neat rows of windows wink from the sides of the Great Pyramid, King Cheops's vast tomb. After nearly five millennia of slow weathering by sand and sun, the monument was overhauled in three months' frenetic construction. Kyoko wonders if she, too, is a relic from the past, as out of place as King Cheops would be. Maybe that would be a fitting title for the painting shaped by her life: *Relic*.

"I'd like to leave you with a final thought," says Dr Mitchell. "Perhaps Nicholas would also be happier without you. Perhaps, whether or not he admits it to himself, he only stays with you out of a sense of duty. Because he thinks you need him, because he's tied to you by marriage."

It is as if someone has punched Kyoko in the stomach. For a moment she can't breathe, the world shifting under her, fractured and strange. But then the moment passes, and she moves onto the next brush-stroke. Nicholas does love her, that knowledge soaked deep into her body, sure as the imprint of his skin curled against hers each night.

She stands up and moves quickly to the door, so that she won't have to shake hands with Dr Mitchell. She nods goodbye, and steps out of the office. Over, it's over for another week, and now she can go home.

Outside again, she notices for the first time that it is a sunny day. Waiting on the platform for the monorail, there's a burst of chatter. She looks around, expecting to see another ad denouncing her, but no one is watching her. Instead they are looking up at the sky, and there, high overhead, a bird flies, the first bird she has seen in the city all year.

"It's a crow," says a man's voice on her left. "They're moving back into the cities again."

The man's voice stirs half-forgotten memories. She turns to look at him. A tall, athletic man with gold-brown skin and pure black eyes. Chris Ina, from the year above her in high school. She spent months nerving herself to ask him out, but in the end she never quite dared.

He smiles at her, and it's a good smile, warm and open, just as she remembers. "You look familiar. Where did we meet? I'm terrible with names."

Surely it's only a chance meeting. Kyoko never told anyone about her teenage crush. And even if the system did arrange the encounter, it's not Chris's fault. They could have a cup of coffee together; she'd like to know what Chris is doing these days.

A surveillance lens glints in the sunlight as it turns to scan the platform.

And Kyoko shakes her head and gives Chris a carefully measured smile. "I'm sorry. I don't recognize you."

The monorail hisses to a halt in front of them. Kyoko gets on last, and sits at the opposite end of the carriage from Chris Ina.

At home that evening, she tells Nicholas about the bird. His face lights up, and he thumps the sofa in excitement. "That's great! Let's hang a bird-feeder on the balcony."

A clatter comes from the kitchen. Kyoko looks at Nicholas, and then both of them are laughing. "Takeo," says Kyoko.

"He couldn't have. Not again," says Nicholas.

Kyoko opens the kitchen-door, shakes her head, feigning sorrowfulness. "Again."

Their dirty supper dishes lie scattered across the kitchen floor. Made of plasware, the dishes haven't broken, but spaghetti sauce has splashed everywhere, like the aftermath of a horror movie. Takeo the house-bot stands in the middle of the mess, scrubbing away furiously with all five arms. His metal eyes refuse to look at Kyoko.

"You know," says Nicholas, striking a pose as though a revelation has just occurred to him, "I hear you can buy newer house-bots."

"Takeo, don't listen to him," says Kyoko, as the house-bot, inherited from her grandparents and older than she is, squirts lemon-scented cleaner onto the tiles. She retreats back into the living room, and she and Nicholas collapse in giggles onto the old sofa. The sofa sags in the middle, pushing them together: one golden brush-stroke, sweet as honey.

On Saturday, Kyoko goes to the florist. She wants to buy Nicholas a gift for his birthday, and he's always complaining that his office is drab. She stands in the flowering-plant section, sniffing busily. She likes the scent of the yellow rosebush best, but the fuchsia looks more elegant, its ornate bell-shaped flowers swaying in the air-conditioned breeze.

The screen behind the plants displays pricing and cultivation information, switching from one flower to the next as Kyoko moves along. She is bending over a miniature magnolia when the screen goes dark. After a moment, the panel lights again, but this time it shows the hallway outside Nicholas's office, his name-plate on the door.

"Nicholas?" asks Kyoko, wondering why he's phoning her from the office. He said he would be at his brother's.

But Nicholas doesn't answer. The screen switches to a camera inside the office. Nicholas is in the corner, pressed against a woman Kyoko has never seen before. His shirt is unbuttoned, and he is fumbling with the woman's bra-straps. No sound comes from the speakers, but somewhere behind her Kyoko hears high-heels clicking along the stone walkway, loud over the rushing in her ears.

She isn't upset. She isn't cross. But it takes a surprising effort to make her way out of the florist's, to walk



to the monorail, to sit straight-backed and dry-eyed on the ride home, planning what she needs to do. Pack, she must pack up a few of her things: clothes, toothbrush, books, the stuffed armadillo from her childhood. Clothes, toothbrush, books, armadillo: she repeats the litany over and over.

Walking up the stairs to the apartment, she concentrates on each movement, as if choreographing a dance. And then she is filling her suitcase, not cross, not unhappy, only empty.

It is only when Takeo rolls through the door and bumps at her legs, his metal eyes pivoting in confusion, that the emptiness breaks. Rage crashes through her, terrifying and alien. She is cut off, adrift in a bitter sea, unable to find a reference point connecting her to the person she was when she woke up in the morning.

Takeo bumps against her legs again, his metal skin cool as a puppy's nose, and she is herself again. She focuses on the suitcase in front of her.

When she leaves the apartment, she tells Takeo to come too. The house-bot uses its arms to hoist itself down the stairs, alternately squeaking and bumping behind her.

Kyoko perches on the edge of the chair during her last appointment with Dr Mitchell. She has filed for divorce, so the court no longer requires her to attend counselling.

"How do you feel?" asks Dr Mitchell. There's no false smile on her face today, and no false sympathy.

"Fine," says Kyoko, because it's the easiest thing to say, and almost true. She is in control, calm, focused. She goes to work each morning. She eats the meals Takeo prepares.

Dr Mitchell says nothing. The Trupicture window behind her shows a still reproduction of an Impressionist painting, water-lilies floating in a pond. Kyoko has no idea who the artist was.

After a long time, Kyoko offers into the silence, "The painting is spoilt."

Confusion surfaces in Dr Mitchell's face. The doctor turns to look behind her, stops. "Which painting is spoilt?"

"Mine. Me. My life."

Silence. Dr Mitchell is a still pool into which Kyoko's

words fall without ripples.

"The painting I made by my life," says Kyoko. "I hadn't even found the right title." For some reason, it is this omission that upsets her. She teeters on the edge of a vast sorrow. All the mornings, days, nights, hours and minutes of her life with Nicholas undone and lost. If she looks at them for more than a moment, she will founder, a ship sinking beneath the waves.

She folds her hands on her lap. "There will be no more painting."

Dr Mitchell doesn't protest. Dr Mitchell doesn't tell her that she'll feel differently in time. Dr Mitchell doesn't suggest that Kyoko ask the system for advice. All the doctor says, after a lengthy silence, is that Kyoko is welcome to visit her again. The doctor hands her a plastic card, its hologram portrait rendered in shades of black and silver. "The card will give you access to phone me wherever I am."

"Why now?" asks Kyoko. It seems an innocuous question, briefly distracting, which is all she asks for. "You never offered me your card before."

"You didn't need me before. I didn't recommend your earlier sessions with me, the court did." Dr Mitchell pauses. "Call me any time."

"Thank you," says Kyoko, and finds she means it. She will think about this sometime later, but for now she concentrates on the task of putting on her jacket, on the walk over to the door, focused, calm, one step at a time.

Maybe one day there will be more than this. Maybe one day she will have coffee with a friend; or walk barefoot along the beach, the waves fizzing as they sink into the sand beneath her toes. Maybe one day she'll even phone Chris Ina.

But if so, that day is very far away.

Mary Soon Lee last appeared here with "The Day Before They Came" (issue 133) and "Cause and Consequence" (issue 136) – the former story has been taken by a major best-of-the-year anthology, and the latter won a small award in the USA for Best Soft SF. Of Irish-Chinese parentage, and British born and raised, she has an MSc in astronautics and space engineering, and now works in computing research in Pittsburgh, PA.

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**All it takes is a little imagination!**

“**B**at. Bi. Hiru. Lau. Bost.”

Olatz held up her small right hand, as if she were taking an oath. Bringing her other hand up alongside it, she added two more fingers. “Sei. Zazpi.” Then, abruptly, she broke into a grin. “I’m sorry. You really don’t remember, do you?”

Smiling in spite of herself, Ana lifted her shoulders, opening her hands to the sky. “I really don’t remember. All but the easiest words are gone.”

“And which are the easiest words?”

“Telefona – I remember that. It’s too obvious to forget.”

“Then we really do have to start from the beginning.”

Olatz tipped her head back and squinted at the clouds that were crawling in over the forest, towards the sea. Heavy clouds, like clenched fists, holding a promise of rain to come. They were dark enough to cast a shadow: some way below them, the ocean, too, was growing dark. People were leaving the beach in twos and threes, hastily bundling up towels, bags, stray items of clothing. From the steep hillside, Olatz and Ana watched them go. After a while the pale sands were empty, and only the most dedicated surfers were left, riding back and forth upon the waves.

A policeman, one of the Guardia Civil, was watching the surfers from the jetty. His eyes were hidden behind two black circles, but even so his contempt was obvious: he made no attempt to conceal it. The heavy, sullen shape of his revolver clung to his hip. He raised his head, as if catching a scent upon the air, and slowly turned to stare up at the hillside. For a moment the gaze of those twin circles rested on the two women sitting there; then the man turned away, looking back over the sea.

“Do you think we look suspicious?” Ana wondered.

“I doubt it,” Olatz replied. “Anyway, there’s a cease-fire on.”

Ana stared down at the bodies in the water. “Don’t the surfers ever give up?”

Olatz raised her eyes to Heaven. “Only when the first shaft of lightning hits the water. If my boyfriend wasn’t working, he’d be down there with them. What can I do? The sea calls to him, and he goes.” She shook her head, smiling a rueful smile. “Never mind. Let’s see how far we can get before the rain catches up with us.”

Sitting on the grass, beneath the curdling cloud, Ana began to re-learn the language she had forgotten. The numbers came easily: after only a few moments she could name them, from Bat to Hamar. They were still there, in the recesses of her memory, buried deep, but not yet vanished. A few other words had survived, hidden deep down, unused, unwanted these past ten years. The rest had been lost completely.

At last Olatz rose to her feet, brushing away the quills and spurs of grass that clung to her jeans.

“That’s enough Basque for one day. You don’t want to push yourself too hard. And I don’t want to get wet.”

“All right.” Ana did her best to mask her disappointment. She had been enjoying the lesson. “Even the surfers are leaving,” she added, peering down to the darkening sea below. “I suppose that means it’s time to go.”

As they made their way down the winding path and

# Forgotten Tongues

*Alexander Glass*

into the town, Olatz told her: “I didn’t think you’d come back. Now that you have...” The words trailed off. Olatz began again: “I don’t really know what to say to you any more. It’s like meeting someone new, a stranger.”

Ana gave her friend a small, sad smile. “After ten years, it should be. We were different people, then. We were children.”

“You make me feel like a child still, now that you’re a professor.”

“Not yet! I’m studying European languages. But I never studied Basque.”

“Well, Basque isn’t a European language. But of course you know that...”

Olatz fell silent, a frown gathering on her brow. She glanced back, to where her friend was walking in her footsteps. Then her gaze slipped past Ana, along the path, up to the spot on the hillside where they had been sitting: a patch of grass in the shadow of the trees. Ana turned, following her gaze, but could see nothing out of the ordinary. The dark green branches were shuddering in the wind; above them, the clouds writhed and coiled, restless and eager. Not a single drop of rain had fallen, but already the taste of it was in the air.

“What is it? Did you see something?”

“Nothing.” Olatz shook her head, as if to clear her mind of an unwanted notion. “Nothing,” she repeated,

more firmly. "Sometimes you imagine strange things, by storm light."

Ana slept badly that night. Her dreams were shaded with storm light; but there was nothing strange about them. Instead, they were uncomfortably familiar. She had seen them a dozen times before.

The family were at the southern edge of the town, away from the sea; but the scent of salt water still clung to their skin. Ana and Naiara scrambled up the green hillside, running from where the slope was gentle to where it became arduous, never slackening their pace. On they went, each sister a mirror image of the other, over the crest of the hill and into the trees; racing each other, and racing the coming rain.

Their mother stayed below, dozing on the front seat of the car, a book sitting open, face-down, in her lap. Sometimes she would stir, turning one eye up to the sky, or down to the watch at her wrist. The twins knew, in the way that children know, that they had only a little while left. A little while to play in the woods.

Naiara reached the treeline before her sister. She caught herself, with one grubby hand, on the black, rutted body of the nearest tree, and swung around it with a triumphant cry. She glanced over her shoulder, into the gloom of the forest. Then, as Ana caught up with her, she began to speak.

In her dream, Ana listened helplessly, not understanding a single word. She struggled to catch some meaning, but failed: the words fell through her mind and disappeared. Once, she knew, she would have understood. Now, the words would not even stay in her memory.

She had been eleven years old, then. Ten minutes older than her sister. Now she was ten years older: she was 21, but Naiara would always be eleven.

With an effort, she hauled herself back into wakefulness. There was no need to see any more. She knew what would come next.

It was raining outside. Ana peeled away the blankets, and shivered as the cold air wrapped itself around her body. Her skin was damp and clammy with sweat. For one bewildered moment she thought the scent of the nightmare was lingering in the room; then she realized it was only the scent of rain. Brushing the cascade of blonde hair from her face, she padded softly over to the window, and cast open the shutters.

Even now, long after midnight, the town was flooded with light. The wet road gleamed under the stern glare of the streetlamps; smaller, softer lights nestled, like glowing fruit, in the branches of the plane trees by the side of the road. A motorbike leapt past the window, too fast, the rider's skinny shoulders hunched up against the rain. The scrape of his engine was lost in the sound of the deluge; as he vanished into the distance, a curtain of water closed behind him. Ana shivered as she watched him disappear, tracing the glow of his tail-light into the rain. As her eyes followed the dwindling light, her mind wandered back to the dream, back ten years into the past.

It had been raining when her mother had found her

at last. Ana had given up searching by then. She sat alone in the shelter of a tree, its rough hide at her back. Her eyes were red with tears. She was whispering Naiara's name.

At first she had shouted as loud as she could; but Naiara had not heard her. By the time her mother found her, her voice had shrunk to a whisper. She whispered her sister's name; and she whispered something else, something in the language they shared, the language no one else could follow.

That was the worst of the dream: hearing her own voice, hearing the whispered words that fell from her lips, and not being able to understand. If she understood, if she could decipher the words in her dream, then she might be able to make sense of what had happened. But her understanding had ended that day. She had woken the next morning to find the words were gone from her memory; and no matter how she tried, she could never recall their meaning.

"And what about Basque?" Olatz asked her, gently, the next morning. "Did you forget how to speak Basque on that same day?"

Ana shook her head. "No. That happened more slowly. After we moved away. There was just no need to speak it, and we didn't use it at home. So it disappeared bit by bit, word by word."

Olatz bit into her sandwich, leaning forward to keep the crumbs from spilling on to the floor. "It's coming back quickly enough," she said, through a mouthful of bread and ham. "I'm impressed. You pick up vocabulary very fast." Her eyes narrowed, in mock resentment. "Do you know how long I've been struggling to learn English? Mother of God! A language with no rules, only exceptions. And it isn't only the words. It's like you have to learn a different way to see the world."

Ana felt a smile teasing at the corners of her mouth. A lopsided smile, but a smile all the same. "It is," she said, simply. "You can't believe in something unless you have a name for it." Then: "Actually I'm learning quite slowly, for me. It isn't anything like learning a European language. There, if you know one, you can gain a foothold on another. Even the English can do it, if they try. With Basque there's nothing to hold on to. Only the newest words are easy, the ones that have leaked in from outside."

Olatz held up two pieces of bread stuffed to overflowing with ham, one piece in each hand. "Sandwich-ak."

"Sandwich-ak. There, you see? I won't forget that one."

Olatz laid the sandwiches down on her plate, carefully, so that they wouldn't fall open. "You wanted to go into the mountains today. Do you still want to?"

Ana nodded, slowly, as if she were not quite sure. "I have to. Don't worry: I don't expect to find any..." She could not quite bring herself to finish the sentence. It was better not to give names to her fears. "...Anything."

"No? Are you sure?"

"No." Ana sighed. "I hoped that coming back would trigger a memory. Something to help me work out what

happened. So far, I've had nothing – just the same old nightmare, maybe a little clearer than before, but nothing else.”

“Maybe there's nothing to remember,” Olatz suggested, mildly. “It's possible that you didn't know what happened, even then. You said yourself that you had been looking for her. That means you didn't know where she was; it means you didn't see where she went, or what happened to her.”

“But maybe I knew where she ought to have been,” Ana mused, and a frown crept across her brow. “She told me something. Just before we went into the trees, she told me something. Maybe she told me where she was going. I can still hear the words in my dream – but I can't understand them. Later, when my mother found me, I was saying something in that same language. I think there must be something in those words. If not an answer, then maybe, at least, a place to start. Even if I knew the words had no meaning at all, that would be something.”

“This was your secret language? No one else could speak it?”

“No one else could even understand. Idioglossia, they call it. It's not so unusual among twins; it can happen with other children, too, any children who spend a lot of time together. Every invented language is different: and the odd thing is, each one conforms to linguistic rules, grammatical rules. And each one is forgotten as the speakers grow up, and grow apart. A new language is born; it grows; it dies. All in the space of a few years.”

Olatz shook her head. Her mouth had twisted into a bitter shape.

“Listen, if want to know about dead languages, Basque is the perfect example. In 50 years it will be gone, forgotten. My children might speak it – they will, if I have anything to do with it – but my grandchildren probably won't. Franco couldn't kill it. He tried, and I think he only succeeded in making it stronger, for a while. But he didn't really have to try. Time will wear it away, in the end, like the sea wears away the stone. And then the Basque country will be gone, too.”

“You don't believe that.”

“No,” Olatz admitted. “At least I don't want to.” She sighed, and forced her mouth to form a smile. “I'm glad you want to learn the language, Ana, but unless you're going to live here, I can't see how it will be of any use to you.”

Ana thought about this. “An invented language can't come from nowhere. Our secret language wasn't Basque – I would have recognized it in the dream, even if I couldn't understand it – but we might have borrowed some of the vocabulary, and some of the grammatical structure.”

“But you don't know that you did. Not for sure.”

Ana raised her hands. “So I have to learn more. You have to teach me more. Vocabulary first. Then grammar. Then, when the dream comes back again, I'll be able to know for sure.” She nodded, firmly, wishing she could believe her words.

old streets around the square, the town hall, the convent, all just as they had been ten years before. At the edges of the town, the buildings had spilled over, new flats rising up, as if to form a barrier to the world outside. Walking from the edge of town to the centre took no more than 15 minutes; but Ana felt she was walking back through time.

To the north, there was no space for the town to grow: if it moved any further, it would topple into the sea. To the south, the mountains began, wrapped in dark forests and shrouded with pale strands of cloud. As they crossed the town square, with its bandstand and its banners, Ana looked up to the green shadow ahead, and bit her lip. As they crossed the railway line she turned her face suddenly to the ground, her eyes fixed on the dusty road.

Olatz looked at her friend. “Are you all right?”

“I'm fine,” Ana replied, and said no more until they had left the town behind, and were climbing the sloping hill, towards the trees.

It was still early; the rising sun had not yet swept away the cobwebs of mist that clung to the branches. All was silent; Ana could hear her footsteps on the cold, wet grass, and the sound of her own breathing as she struggled up the hillside. It seemed a more difficult climb than she remembered: as children, she and Naiara had clambered to the top in a matter of moments. But then, they had usually played here in the long summer afternoons, after the sun had dried the ground. Now she had to pause, every few steps, to make sure of her footing: the grass seemed to be slipping away beneath her shoes.

Up on the ridge, Olatz looked back over her shoulder at the shape of the town below.

“Do you want me to come with you?” she asked.

Ana said nothing, but gave her a small, timid nod. Olatz nodded back, and followed her friend into the trees, making sure they kept close together.

All at once the town was gone, as if it had never been. There was only the forest – the thick, heavy scent of it, the weight of the trees around them, the sense that time was slowed by the place. Now and again, Ana peered upwards to where the bright sky shone through gaps and tears in the branches.

Their footsteps were louder, in amongst the trees. Listening to the sound, Ana grew uneasy. It seemed as if there were three people moving in the forest, rather than two. She looked this way and that, but saw no one; then she told herself she must be imagining things. She glanced back at Olatz, with an uneasy smile.

When she looked ahead again, there was a man standing before her on the path.

She recognized him at once. It was the policeman they had seen from the hillside. He still wore his sunglasses, even in the meagre light that fell between the trees; the gun still clung to his hip. He had been waiting for them. Ana raised her head, defiant, doing her best to hide her fear. Suddenly she imagined him speaking, talking to her in the secret language she had shared with Naiara. The thought was absurd – their own mother had not understood them – but it was unnerving all the same. When his thick lips parted, and Spanish words escaped

The town had changed very little. Ana remembered the



them, it was almost a relief.

"I've been watching you," he said.

"Obviously."

"I wonder where the two of you could be going?"

"If you need to ask, you can't have been watching closely enough."

The man's face hardened. The heel of his hand rested on the butt of his gun, the fingers splayed out in the air.

He said, softly: "You might be a couple of friends, walking in the woods. No harm in that. On the other hand you might be radicals, terrorists, here for a rendezvous. How can I tell one from another?"

Olatz said: "There is a cease-fire on."

"Yes, there is. A convenient excuse for you to re-group, and to communicate with your comrades in hiding. I don't trust you. I don't trust any of you."

Ana thought of her sister, and closed her eyes.

"All right." The policeman seemed to have reached a decision. He waved them past him, peering into the trees ahead. Then he turned to Ana. "I know your face. I'm sure I've seen it before. Maybe you were on a wanted poster. Maybe in our files. Maybe even in the newspaper."

"Yes?"

The man nodded. "I'm sure of it."

She had been in the newspaper, of course. There had been a photo of the two twins together, grinning cheekily at the camera, their arms around each other's shoulders. There were no photographs of Naiara alone, only of the twins together. The caption beneath the picture did not say which of the sisters had disappeared.

"You're looking for something," the man continued. "Do you think I can't tell when someone's looking for something? Something, or someone. Fine – keep on looking. And when you find them, I can take you all in."

Olatz sighed heavily, and shook her head, but Ana took a step further into the trees, peering this way and that, listening to the sound of her own footsteps as she crushed the dead leaves beneath her boots. The leaves whispered and chuckled as they broke.

Once again, a storm was building. It was still some way off, and perhaps it would pass by the little town altogether; but above the tangle of trees the sky was smudged with cloud, and storm light filtered down between the leaves. The air had turned cool, and silence filled the place – an expectant silence, as if the forest were waiting for someone to speak.

A voice drifted from somewhere ahead: it seemed to float between the branches, from the dark, forgotten recesses of the forest; from the memory of the trees. A girl's voice. Olatz heard the words it spoke, but could not understand them. She frowned, instinctively trying to make sense of the words. Though she knew she could never decipher their meaning, she understood the feeling behind them. The girl was lost, alone, nervous but not yet frightened, searching for a way out of the woods.

The policeman grew tense, scowling, his eyes glinting behind their black lenses. One hand hovered near his gun, waiting to pounce upon it; the fingers moved slowly back and forth, like weed at the ocean floor, swaying in

the current. He too was listening. At first, like Olatz, he tried to make sense of the words. Then he abandoned the attempt. His gaze flickered over the trees, seeking the source of the voice; then to Olatz, who had wrapped her arms about her shoulders; and then to Ana.

Ana was crying, silently, twin tears rolling from her eyes and marking out clumsy lines upon her face. With the heel of her hand she brushed them away, angrily, as if ashamed that anyone should see them. She took a single, trembling step into the gloom; then a second, and a third. Leaning with one hand against the rotten black body of a tree, she listened once more.

"Naiara?" she whispered.

Once again the voice reached them, the same phrase as before, the same pattern of sound in the air. A slow smile grew at the corners of Ana's mouth. She tipped her head to one side and closed her eyes, listening, slowly remembering.

"Naiara," she repeated softly. Then she spoke again, using words only her sister would know.

"What is she saying?" The policeman spat the question into the air. He turned to Olatz, demanding an answer. Receiving only a shrug and a shaken head in reply, he seized Ana by the shoulder. "What language is that? Not Basque – I would have recognized it. Not French. Not English. I can speak English," he added, unable to keep a note of pride from slipping into his voice. "A code, then," he concluded. "A secret language, that only the Basques can use."

Exasperated, Olatz bit back a curse. "Why would the Basques need a secret language, when we already have Basque? Anyway," she added bitterly, "there's a cease-fire on."

She reached out to pull his hand from Ana's shoulder, but the man hurled her aside. His lips curled into something like a grin. "There's no cease-fire," he told her, softly. "The word means nothing. There won't be a cease-fire until all of your terrorists are locked up. Or in the ground."

He believed it, Olatz knew. He had forgotten how to believe anything else.

Then there came the sound of footsteps up ahead, in the shadow of the trees. At once, the policeman's gun leapt into his hand.

"Who's there?" he called.

The reply was not in Spanish, nor in Basque. Strange words floated out of the gloom; and moments later, the speaker followed them, steeping out of the dark and into the clearing where they stood. To Olatz it seemed that the figure had not stepped out of the dark, but stepped out of nowhere, building from a wisp of smoke beneath the trees to a solid human form; but she could not be sure.

It was a little girl. It was Naiara. Olatz remembered her, and the shock of recognition made her catch her breath. The girl ran to her sister, smiling, her eyes bright with tears. She paused a moment, unsure, then fell into Ana's arms.

She spoke, softly, to her sister, and Ana laughed.

"What is she saying?" The policeman waved his gun in the air. "Tell me."

Ana glanced up at him, then turned back to her sister. "She wants to know how long she was hiding. She doesn't remember the time: she thought it was only a few hours. When she lost me, she was frightened, but she knew I'd find her sooner or later."

The man frowned, as if trying to understand some abstruse puzzle. "What do you mean? Did she come across the border? What does she have to do with the nationalist movement?"

"Nothing," Olatz whispered, staring at the two sisters. "Don't you understand? She wasn't even here."

"No," the man agreed, "she was in hiding. Well, now she can come back with me. You can all come back with me." So saying, he placed his gun at Naiara's temple. "Get up."

Naiara stared at him, and voiced a question in her secret language.

"She says she doesn't understand you," Ana translated. "She wants to know what you said." She closed her eyes. "I think, all this time, she's been in a place created by our language."

Olatz shook her head. "How can that be?"

Smiling, Ana glanced away, into the trees, and shrugged. "In the same way that the Basque language creates the Basque country."

"That's enough." The policeman pressed the barrel of his gun into the little girl's skin. "Time to come and explain yourself to the authorities."

Ana glanced at Olatz, who gave a tiny nod.

"Bost," Ana said, softly. "Lau. Hiru. Bi. Bat."

As the count reached "Bat," Olatz cried out, and fell to the ground, clutching her shin with both hands. The policeman whirled around; and, in an instant, the two sisters were running into the trees. The man threw Olatz an evil look, and set off in pursuit.

Some time later, wandering the forest, Olatz came upon another clearing. She had seen no sign of Ana and Naiara, and no sign of the policeman. At times she had thought there had been footsteps nearby, hurried steps that ground the dead leaves beneath them; panting breaths, and, occasionally, strange words whispered on the wind.

She had no idea in which direction the town lay. She had thought that she knew these woods: that one could walk through them, on to the scarred face of the mountain, in less than an hour. But she had already been wandering for longer than that. She thought of the little girl, lost here for years, and shivered.

There was a rustling sound from somewhere up ahead, the soft crunch of leaves beneath booted feet. Someone was creeping through the trees, trying to move without making a sound. Olatz stood still, and waited as the footsteps came closer.

It was the man of the Guardia Civil. He came from between two tall pines whose heads grazed the heavy clouds above. With the gun still sitting in his hand, he moved toward Olatz; but he did not see her. When she stepped aside, he simply moved past the place where she had been, not even turning to look at her. Then he was gone, vanished into the forest; and Olatz was sure

he had faded away before her eyes, melting into a handful of smoke.

She ran, then, with no thought of finding her friend, with no thought but to get out of the trees as quickly as she could. The branches slashed at her as she ran, and the damp ground slipped and slid beneath her feet. The scent of the storm was in the air; she ran from that, too.

At last she heard voices: Basque voices. A young couple was walking along the edge of the treeline, making their way back into town before the rain hit the mountainside. Olatz heard them before she saw them; but as soon as she heard the voices she knew that this was her own world. She stumbled to the edge of the trees, and leaned against one of them for a moment, her breath heaving, before beginning the trek down the hill.

As she walked, a memory struck her, and a frown gathered on her brow. She glanced back up the hillside, to where they had entered the forest. Once again, as the storm grew near, the branches were shuddering in the wind; above them, the clouds were rolling, and the taste of rain hung in the air.

She remembered what she had told Ana the day before. "Sometimes you imagine strange things, by storm light."

There was a figure at the edge of the trees. At first she thought it was the policeman, walking his lonely path through the forest; and, for the first time, she felt a touch of sorrow for him, knowing that he might wander there forever.

Then she saw it was not the man at all.

Under the shadow of the trees, there were two figures, two girls, each a mirror-image of the other. They might have been eleven years old. One turned to the other, and spoke, in a tongue that Olatz could not understand. It was a strange sound, almost like the cry of an animal, but given shape and meaning. The other girl nodded, and replied in the same language. Then both of them laughed, together.

They peered out of the trees, still smiling, and waved. Olatz hesitated a moment, then waved back. She was not sure whether they could see her.

The two girls turned away, and ran into the trees, one hard on the heels of the other. In a moment they were gone, vanishing like smoke into the gloom; and in another moment, the trees were hidden behind a veil of rain.

Olatz scrambled to the foot of the hill and ran into the town, not stopping until she reached home. There would be a search, she knew: for the missing woman, and for the missing man. She knew, too, that neither would be found. But Ana was not lost. She had found the language that she had lost, and followed where it led her.

Olatz sat by her window and looked out over the restless ocean. She wept for a while, until the first shaft of lightning hit the water. Then she dried her eyes, curled up on her bed, and let the whisper of the rain soothe her to sleep.

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Alexander Glass has become an *Interzone* regular. His last story, "Grandma's Bubble and the Speaking Clock," appeared here only a month ago. He lives in London.

# "Pastwonder: The Redemption of Orson Scott Card"

Gary Westfahl

For the record, I don't spend all my time devising new ways to irritate *Interzone* readers: I teach college classes, struggle to function as a proper husband and father, and work on other writing projects that usually demand reading and research. Some tasks provide only the satisfaction of publication or a free book in exchange for a review; others offer payments ranging from the inconsequential to the almost-consequential.

So it was that my reading during one recent month was limited to two areas: Everett F. Bleiler's massive reference book, *Science-Fiction: The Gernsback Years* (1998), summarizing every single story published in the science fiction magazines between 1926 and 1936, which I'm reviewing for the journal *Extrapolation*; and the science fiction novels and stories of Orson Scott Card, which I read in order to write an essay for another massive reference book, Richard Bleiler's second edition of *Science Fiction Writers* (1999).

Other than the distinguished Bleiler family connection (son Richard assisted Everett with *Science-Fiction: The Gernsback Years* and takes over for his father in editing *Science Fiction Writers*), the two projects apparently had little in common, yet I sensed a strange symmetry in my reading assignments. Examining Bleiler's extraordinary compilation, I could observe the beginnings of an interesting process; analyzing the storytelling genius of Orson Scott Card, I could observe signs of its conclusion.

Generally, *Science-Fiction: The Gernsback Years* has confirmed my impression of the often-misrepresented formative years of magazine science fiction: asked to characterize that era in one word, I would be torn between "diversity" and "monotony."

Diversity? While there were, predictably, space operas of the "Doc" Smith variety, these did not entirely dominate the magazines. Rather, almost every type of story imaginable appeared: utopias and dystopias following the classic models; stories of exotic lost races recalling H. Rider Haggard, still sometimes located in remote terrestrial realms but more frequently inside the Earth or on other planets; future-war stories of the sort perfected by George Griffith, typically involving obsessed scientists bent upon world conquest employing astounding inventions; other stories of powerful inventions deliberately or accidentally misused, with disastrous results; stories about adventurous aviators sprinkled with some advanced technology (an unfortunate specialty of *Scoops*, the sole British magazine represented in the book); oddities like tales of personified antibodies in the bloodstream battling invasive bacteria; and mundane stories of "scientific detectives" in contemporary society with no speculative elements.

Monotony? As is apparent, all these sorts of stories tended to follow particular patterns that usually had existed for decades before Hugo Gernsback started publishing science fiction magazines. The same formulas occur again and again: the story

opens with an elderly scientist ushering friends into the laboratory to admire his latest invention, and if a young hero is among them, you can be sure the scientist has a lovely daughter ready for wooing. If the invention proves dangerous, some concluding contrivance – the death of the only man who understood its operation, destruction of essential notes, exhaustion of a required rare ingredient – removes the invention from the scene to restore the status quo. Every lost race is governed by a beautiful princess with a predilection for falling madly in love with the first handsome stranger who penetrates her realm. Space travellers are precisely analogous to cowboys or sailors, with humanoid aliens standing in for the Indians or Germans.

What these authors failed to recognize was that science fiction was best created not by fitting superficial oddities into familiar patterns, but by *thinking* about potential oddities in a logical manner, extrapolating from present to future and considering the long-range effects of innovations that spread throughout society (as opposed to the brief disruptive effects of one evanescent invention). Some writers well before Gernsback, most notably H. G. Wells, had achieved their own understanding of the concept; a few writers who worked for Gernsback, most notably Stanley G. Weinbaum, also figured it out; a few years later, Robert A. Heinlein and other newcomers demonstrated their own mastery of the process; and John W. Campbell, Jr, absorbed and explained their methods to everyone.

The result was a tremendous increase in the production of superior science fiction, beginning in the 1940s and continuing into the present.

However, we cannot be sure that this production will always continue. As David Brin has noted, the number of interesting ideas for science fiction stories is not necessarily infinite. Some of the genre's stalwart tropes – like human expansion into space to build empires and encounter aliens – have been drained of all vitality and seem increasingly incongruous in the context of our burgeoning awareness of the realities of space travel. When new concepts like cloning or space elevators do become available, they may be seized upon, exploited, and exhausted with amazing rapidity; while other new concepts – like a ten-dimensional universe folding into a semblance of three dimensions a few microseconds after the Big Bang – do not lend themselves to involving, character-driven narratives. A few contemporary writers can still hit upon genuinely novel ideas that lead to imaginative stories, but these seem increasingly rare. What writers do instead, and what they do very well, is to retell old stories better than they have been told before; however, examining superbly crafted redactions of familiar ideas inspires little optimism about the future of science fiction.

Enter Orson Scott Card.

Say what you will about Card, but he has always been scrupulously honest in describing why he became a science fiction writer. He grew up with no special fondness for or commitment to the genre; he read some science fiction, but mostly read other stuff. He began writing science fiction not due to any interest in scientific speculation, but because he concluded, after surveying the options, that science fiction offered the best opportunities for new writers.

Oddly, Card was first pigeonholed as an *Analog* writer specializing in hard science fiction, though his novelties stemmed more from inspired cleverness than from scientific acumen. While some intriguing concepts surfaced in his first two Ender novels, *Ender's Game* and *Speaker for the Dead*, he was visibly reduced to moving chess pieces around the board while churning out the next two instalments, *Xenocide* and *Children of the Mind*. Worse yet, one day, when he couldn't think of an idea for a science fiction novel, he picked up his trusty *Book of Mormon* and realized that, with some jazzy substitutions, he could turn the story into a five-volume, far-future epic, and that's exactly what he did in his "Homecoming" saga, surely the low point of his

career. It was almost a relief to observe Card turning his attention to fantasies and mildly horrific "mainstream" novels like *Lost Boys*.

No one can deny that Card is a masterful storyteller and writer, but in terms of what Wells and Heinlein achieved, it became increasingly hard to regard him as a true *science fiction writer*. He was simply telling stories that had been told before, better than they had been told before, and the stories occasionally took the form of science fiction. So, by 1998, I had given up on Card and hence had not read *Pastwatch: The Redemption of Christopher Columbus* (1996).

However, one reason writing for reference books can be fun is that it forces you to read books you might not have otherwise read, often with pleasing results – as *Pastwatch* surprisingly demonstrated.

To summarize the story not as it is told, but from a fifth-dimensional chronological perspective: in the earliest version of history referenced, Columbus is obsessed not with sailing to the West but with leading a new Crusade, and his advocacy leads to a ruinous campaign that drains Europe of resources and manpower. Meanwhile, a rapidly developing Meso-American civilization masters shipbuilding, sails East, and conquers a weakened Europe, imposing a brutal dictatorship founded on human sacrifice and engendering centuries of misery. Eventually, to improve their own history, scientists invent time travel and send a projector into the past showing Columbus a vision ordering him to abandon dreams of a Crusade and sail West instead. This intervention erases Earth's barbaric history and leads to our own history of Europe conquering America, with its own unfortunate results – slavery, exploitation, and widespread environmental damage still threatening humanity in the future. When members of *Pastwatch*, a team of scientists using special devices to observe the past, deduce what has occurred, they resolve to use their own newly developed form of time travel to change, and improve, history again: three people return to the past and persuade Columbus to remain in the New World as the leader of a new, enlightened American nation that will prevent mistreatment of both people and the environment.

The novel can be read metaphorically: people continually seek to improve their history by rediscovering forgotten figures and reinterpreting familiar icons. Contemporary history books feature more women and persons of colour, rescued from obscurity by diligent research, and we

eagerly embrace the notion that Columbus, instead of being an avatar of European paternalism, was really someone who, with a little nudging, might have established a non-racist, non-sexist society in the 15th century. While villains and shameful events cannot be entirely removed from the picture, we strive in every conceivable way to make our history seem more humane, more congruent with contemporary values, than it has been previously portrayed. The intervention of Card's time travellers to upgrade their own history, then, might be viewed as a science-fictional metaphor for what historians and commentators do all the time.

Still, the book more disquietingly invites a literal reading, because erasing old history and creating new history is something that may actually be feasible in the future. Working within the confines of general relativity, physicists have designed time machines; the last model I heard of required the energy of an entire galaxy to funnel a few muons through time, but such technical problems may be overcome, perhaps sooner than we think. And if we could entirely eliminate our undesirable past, is this something we would really want to do?

What distinguishes *Pastwatch* from the other "alternate histories" it is associated with is first its chilling recognition that changing human history will involve changing absolutely everything. Given the premise of *Pastwatch*, someone like Harry Turtledove might work up the story of King James's ambassador to America, John Smith, summoning William Shakespeare out of retirement to write a play for the visiting American ruler, Pocahontas – the sort of "comfy manipulation of the familiar," to use Darrell Schweitzer's phrase, that so often characterizes the sub-genre. Yet Card's protagonists realize quite well that a major change in one moment of time will eliminate every person born afterwards: keep Columbus in America, and King James, Smith, Shakespeare and Pocahontas will never exist. Changing history does not mean playfully shuffling the deck of humanity, but entirely throwing it away. The major weakness in *Pastwatch* is that this awesome decision to erase billions of human lives to produce a history with less injustice and suffering occurs with insufficient deliberation; they are eliminating the evils of slavery and colonialism, true, but they are also eliminating Beethoven and Picasso – perhaps to replace them with other, equally wonderful talents, but there are no guarantees of that.



The fact that *Pastwatch*'s tinkering with history is debated, planned and meticulously carried out represents the second feature distinguishing *Pastwatch* from other alternate histories. The sub-genre's tangled permutations of reality usually just *happen*, either with no explanation at all or as an unforeseen accident – someone stands on the wrong hill during the battle of Gettysburg and changes the outcome of the Civil War. However, remember that, as writers of Gernsback's era did not understand, the best and most interesting sort of science fiction depicts not mysterious one-time marvels, but thoroughly understood and institutionalized marvels. *Pastwatch* almost uniquely presents a future society that has the power, as may someday be the case, to deliberately and intelligently create an alternate history, and that provides far more for readers to chew on than the cute twists and role-reversals that otherwise permeate the sub-genre. In this respect, *Pastwatch* recalls another classic novel, Gregory Benford's *Timescape*, which also depicts scientists thoughtfully seeking to change the past to avoid their disastrous present. And, since Benford's final creation of two distinct

timelines is a more reassuring result than Card's erasure of the old timeline, one can argue that Card is being especially courageous by defying conventional human desires – the goal of science fiction as Campbell once articulated it – to interpret the cold equations in the coldest possible manner.

Further, Card ups the ante by indicating that humans may be able to do this more than once. In the world of *Pastwatch*, perhaps they have and perhaps they will: the reprehensible American invasion of Europe may itself represent some prior civilization's improvement upon an even more dismal history; descendants of the superior culture emerging from Columbus's new America may eventually resolve to change the past again and achieve an even better world. A vision emerges of a future society, having mastered time travel, that sets out to constantly improve its history through innumerable changes in its past, eventually creating a utopia not only in its present, but throughout its entire history – big thoughts, awe-inspiring thoughts, but not entirely impossible thoughts, and that is, after all, what science fiction is supposed to provide.

It's easy to foresee the demise of

science fiction, and I've done a bit of that myself. But to discover a disturbing and genuine science fiction novel emerging from a source as unlikely as Orson Scott Card is enough to inspire momentary optimism. If such miracles can occur, maybe the genre isn't dead just yet.

Gary Westfahl

**Editor's Note:** Some readers may notice apparent inconsistencies of hyphenation in the above piece. The usages are not according to our normal editorial practice, but follow Gary Westfahl's (and Everett F. Bleiler's) wishes. Mr Bleiler, rather eccentrically these days, believes that the noun phrase "science fiction" should be hyphenated (as in his title *Science-Fiction: The Gernsback Years*), while Mr Westfahl is of the opinion that the "sf" phrase should never be hyphenated, even when it is used adjectivally (as in "science-fiction magazines"). Normally, we leave the noun phrase unhyphenated and deliberately hyphenate the adjectival. However, we have bowed to Gary Westfahl's wishes in this case, and have left everything just as he wrote it.

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With a striking central trope, Vernor Vinge's Hugo-winning *A Fire Upon the Deep* remade the Universe into a stage-set for a vast and intricate space opera. According to Vinge's radical cosmology, every galaxy is zoned by different qualities of electromagnetic activity, including thought: from the chthonic Unthinking Depths around the core, through the Slow Zone, where faster-than-light travel and AIs cannot operate, to the Beyond, haunted by things like gods. One of the heroes of *A Fire Upon the Deep*, in a multi-stranded narrative burgeoning with heroes, is Phan Nuwen, a trader rescued, like Buck Rogers, from suspended animation on a ship after centuries spent in the Unthinking Depths. Vinge's new novel, *A Deepness in the Sky* (Tor, \$27.95), is Phan Nuwen's backstory and, perhaps, a slingshot for a third volume. It is a story straight from the heart of sf, but it is neither comforting nor cosy.

It's far in the future, but 30,000 years before the events of *A Fire Upon the Deep*. Humanity is spreading through the stars in a loose federation of rising and waning civilizations knit by the Qeng Ho, traders who survive decades-long slower-than-light journeys in suspended animation. A group of Qeng Ho mount an expedition to the OnOff star, on whose single planet an alien civilization is emerging. One of the members of the expedition, in the disguise of a cranky old programmer, is Phan Nuwen, who tried to forge the Qeng Ho into an empire but fled into obscurity after betrayal.

The OnOff star cycles between 215 years of quiescence and 35 years of normal activity; all life on its planet, including the intelligent Spiders, survives the two centuries of freezing dark in deep hibernation. The Qeng Ho expedition reaches the OnOff star just as its fusion processes are about to relight, and encounters an expedition launched by another human civilization, the Emergents. After agreeing to cooperate in study of and then contact with the Spiders, the Emergents launch a sneak attack which almost destroys the fleets of both sides. The triumphant Emergents enslave many of the surviving Qeng Ho with the Focus virus, which turns people into efficient monomaniac zipheads, and wait for the Spiders' civilization to reach a high enough level so that they can be enslaved to help the expedition leave.

Although on a much smaller scale than its predecessor, *A Deepness in the Sky* is a cat's cradle of intertwined, richly detailed narratives: Phan Nuwen's history, and his scheme to subvert the Emergents; the attempt by young, naive Ezr Vinh to protect

the surviving Qeng Ho from the brutal Emergents; the technological ascendancy of one of the Spider's nations, an edisonade centred on the family of the polymath genius Sherkaner Underhill. There's wide-screen space opera that radically refashions tropes (space battles, interstellar traders, deep-dyed, albeit somewhat pulpy, villains, casual evocation of vast sweeps of space and time) from the Golden Age novels of Poul Anderson, James Blish and Hal Clement. There are meditations on the corrosive nature of political power, the architecture of freefall habitats, and the evolution of computer code (the Qeng Ho's onboard systems require teams of programmers to patch and parse baroque code tens of thousands of years old).

At the heart of the novel in which nothing can be taken for granted is a reversal which turns upon why the Spiders, whose biology is satisfyingly alien, seem so human through most of the narrative (more so than many of the human characters); it is a sleight-of-hand whose crux, a confluence of several intrigues, is masterfully delivered. Sherkaner

## The Joy of Knowing

Paul J. McAuley



Underhill vanishes after producing a new technology which promises to transform both Spider and human societies. A wiser, chastened Phan Nuwen, who is more complex and troubled here than in *A Fire Upon the Deep*, sets off, all unknowing, on what he believes will be a voyage of discovery into the deadly trap of the Unthinking Depths of the Galaxy's centre. For while it is clear to the privileged reader that the OnOff star and its single planet, which contains traces of supertechnology, have wandered into the Slow Zone from the Beyond (although it isn't made clear *why*, nor why the OnOff star behaves as it does), neither Spiders nor humans are allowed a revelation of the true map of the Galaxy, or the reason why ancient dreams of AIs, nanotechnology and faster-than-light travel have never been realized. Perhaps answers to those questions await a third volume.

One can't imagine a greater contrast to Vernor Vinge's sweeping exuberance than the finely focused narrative of Maureen F. McHugh's *Mission Child* (Avon, \$20). In her previous novels, *China Mountain Zhang* and *Half the Day is Night*, McHugh assumed the voices of outsiders trying to survive in hostile societies in which technology is estranging rather than (as in Vinge's fictions, as in the default core notion of sf) empowering. *Mission Child*, the





...tale of a woman trying to make sense of her life after having been culturally and sexually disenfranchised by carelessly-wielded technology, continues that theme.

The setting, shared by McHugh's short stories "The Missionary's Child" and "The Cost to Be Wise," is a colony world which has forgotten its history but has recently been rediscovered by Earth. Fourteen-year-old Janna and her family live in a mission run by two offworlders, and she is one of the few to survive when the mission is ransacked by wild outriders of the Tekse clan. Equipped with hi-tech body modifications by her well-meaning teachers, she flees with her sweetheart, Aslak. She becomes pregnant but loses her baby, then loses Aslak while escaping the Tekse army in a brutal winter she endures only by invoking one of her gifts, and arrives at a refugee camp at the edge of the capital city, where because of malnutrition she is mistaken for a boy, a disguise she wears like armour. Without her lover, her child, her family, her home, or even her own true identity, Janna tries but fails to forge a new life in the city, and at last finds redemption when she confronts a tragedy which strikes in the remote southern islands, to which she has fled to escape (or so she thinks) the influence of the offworlders.

It is a slow-moving story, and the displacement to which we are accustomed in sf narratives is built gradually and subtly, at a languorous pace. The colony world is not very different from Earth; the plight of Janna and her people is not very different from that of Native Americans in the 19th century; her emigration to the southern islands echoes the movement of hippies to India in a vain attempt to escape 20th-century industrial culture. Yet the displacement of cultural colonization to an imagined world universalizes exploration of its moral problems and, with affectless declarative sentences, McHugh skilfully and sympathetically evokes the voice of someone struggling to comprehend bewildering changes forced upon her pretechnological culture. Janna doesn't understand the gifts which help her survive (and their more malignant side-effects are made clear to her and the reader only much later in a revelation which recasts the entire narrative); she believes the spirit of her dead child is trapped in a computer which teaches her the language of the offworlders; in the city, she is caught between her streetwise lover and the shaman for whom she becomes responsible.

Like the sf of Ursula Le Guin, Ian R. MacLeod and Joanna Russ, this tale of the frailty and strength of human spirit, of personal disaster and small yet significant triumphs,

looks inward, not outward. It is focused on the particular rather than the general; on the individual caught in the sweep of change rather than the engines of that change. It occupies only a small niche within the clagorous imperialistic corpus of sf, but it should not be overlooked.

If William Gibson hadn't existed, then it would have been necessary for Jon Courtenay Grimwood to invent him. Grimwood's third novel, *reMix* (Earthlight, £6.99) is a second-generation cyberyarn that's not only full of lowlife adventures of streetwise characters in the margins of a hi-tech society, brand names, boys' toys and plenty of attitude, but is also ornamented with sly references to Gibson's oeuvre (there's even a character called Gibson, who is the secret father of the novel's anti-heroine). And like Gibson's novels, but unlike much second- and third-generation cyberstuff, *reMix* doesn't have any tediously detailed descriptions of hacking protocols or the interfaces through which characters plunge into the dataflux; Grimwood is savvy enough to keep the action of his future-shock thriller strictly out in the open.

And there's plenty of action: like a shark, the increasingly complicated plot has to keep moving or it'll suffocate. It begins on the Moon, with the kidnap of a schoolgirl, LizAlec, the surrogate daughter of a French government minister, Lady Clare. The kidnap is part of the Fourth Reich's war against France. Lady Clare is trapped in a besieged, starving Paris, but smuggles out LizAlec's former lover and ex-pop star, Fixx, to rescue her. Meanwhile, LizAlec has contrived to escape with the help of Lars, one of the displaced sandrats who haunt the service tunnels of the lunar colony, and because LizAlec pretended to be another girl to confuse her kidnappers, a Chinese Warlord has also become involved. While Fixx tracks her down, LizAlec stows away on a spaceship, but falls into the clutches of a religious maniac...

And so on. Grimwood's clenched-jaw hyperkinetic narrative is crammed with gadgets, violent action, some tediously explicit sex, plenty of acerbic humour and vivid imagery. But apart from Fixx, who gets the meatiest and best part of the novel's middle section, none of the characters are particularly likeable (although Lady Clare's growth in moral stature as the novel progresses is nicely depicted), and the tale wears thin at the end. LizAlec conveniently discovers that she is a vessel for the ghosts of her real parents, and ripe with psi powers; Fixx disappears halfway through a climatic scene, never to return; like the straw

tiger it always was, the Fourth Reich is dispatched in a brief coda. Yet although he doesn't quite pull everything together, Grimwood's depiction of the underbelly of a fragmented future has a memorable bite.

#### Also noted:

Don Webb's first novel, *The Double* (St Martin's Press, \$22.95), is an existential murder mystery which, like his unsettling short stories, several of which have appeared in *Interzone*, is deeply imbued with esoteric erudition and a playful internal logic as skewed as the perspective of an Escher print. John Reynman, a divorced games designer living alone in Austin, Texas, discovers a corpse on his living room floor which appears to be his double, down to a tattoo in tribute of an obscure rock band. His investigation into the mystery becomes a game more intriguing and dangerous than any he's designed, forcing him to confront his own past, including his ex-wife. Who keeps shooting at him? Who is the mysterious Dr David R. Niles, and what is the Brotherhood of Travellers? It's a slight, swift story full of pop-cultural echoes; a blend of genuine American weirdness, involuted conspiracy theories, and sly humour that evokes Thomas Pynchon, Terry Southern and R. A. Lafferty.

Brian Aldiss's *The Twinkling of an Eye* (Little, Brown, £20; St Martin's Press, \$29.95) is his *second* autobiography, interpenetrating the story of his literary career told in *Bury My Heart at W. H. Smith's*. Starting with Aldiss's embarkation for service in the Far East during the Second World War, the cunningly carpentered narrative spirals back to his childhood as the scion of a family which owned a department store in small Norfolk town, and then expands outwards and tries to make sense of a restless life whose exuberance is darkened by self-doubt and depression. The first part is the most engaging, a vivid account of the minutiae of small-town bourgeoisie transfixed by Victorian mores, and of the war which destroyed that way of life forever, yet which Aldiss found genuinely liberating. The second part, essentially a series of snapshots of Aldiss's growth as a writer, the disintegration of his first marriage and of the paralysis of depression, is shot through with genuine anguish and an excoriating honesty. It adds up to an intimate self-portrait by the genial Godfather of British sf, whose wide-ranging and tenderly humane fictions are deepened by an abiding interest in the strangeness of the world and the variety of its peoples.

Paul J. McAuley

What if Rome had never fallen? What if Islam had conquered England? What if Napoleon had been a woman? What if Hitler had been born in Huddersfield?

Yes, it's alternate history time again. In *Interzone* 129, Gary Westfahl raised some controversy when he attacked AH as a trivial and escapist genre. He has a point. What is sf, after all – in the grand tradition that stretches from Wells – but a literature of the future, a kind of historical fiction about the history that hasn't happened yet? To trawl back over the history we've already had, asking what-if this, what-if that, seems like selling the pass. So what if there's a parallel world in which Lady Thatcher was a trade-union firebrand – known as "Red Maggie" – who brought News Corp to its knees? Fat lot of good it's done us – but then, the idea is kind of fun, and fun is something that doesn't seem to count much in Westfahl's scheme of things. Besides, these mind-games are more than just fun. If there's a defence of AH – a serious defence – it goes like this: by making us think about what might have been, AH helps us understand the very processes of history. And *that* helps us think about the future.

Think of the most famous AH scenarios. In order, these are probably as follows: Nazis win the Second World War; Reformation never happened; Confederates win the Civil War. What these have in common is that the scenarios are first of all credible – these things *could* have happened – and secondly are of vital interest to us here in the real world. At some time or other, we've all thought about the Nazi victory – we *need* to think about it. Speculation – even if it is about the past – is not always idle.

But Westfahl is no doubt right that most AH – stand up, Harry Turtledove – is anything but this kind of high-minded, improving stuff. In *The Shadow of Albion* by Andre Norton and Rosemary Edghill (Tor, \$23.95), we are presented with an alternate Regency England. As in Joan Aiken's "Willoughby Chase" series, we have a Stuart dynasty still on the throne – and, as in Aiken, we are here very much in the domain of fantasy rather than sf. The question is, is it good fantasy? With one of the names on the cover being that of a much-loved veteran writer, our hopes might be raised – but then, that's the whole point of sharecropping, isn't it?

A foreword sets up the world: James II, Catholic brother of Charles II, never became king; Charles's son, the Duke of Monmouth, was crowned instead. Thus, no Glorious Revolution in 1688. Consequences? Well, with the strong Stuarts on the throne – rather

## Shadows of Albion

Tom Arden

than the weak Hanovers – England never lost America; in 1805, when the story takes place, England – and its colonies – are ruled by Henry IX.

This seems promising; however, while gesturing to alternate Americas and such like, the book focuses on the Napoleonic Wars, which seem much the same in this world as in our own. The plot cuts back and forth between two main characters: the Duke of Wessex, a secret agent derived rather too obviously from the Scarlet Pimpernel, and Sarah Cunningham, a young American magically snatched from our world – that is, our world in 1805 – to take over the role of the Marchioness of Roxbury, her dying counterpart in the alternate world. Together, Wessex and Sarah find themselves caught up in a Pimpernel-style intrigue involving disappearing royals and perilous continental forays.

It's fast-moving stuff, entertaining enough, but essentially this is historical romance of a very conservative sort, tricked out – no doubt for commercial reasons – in a veneer of fantasy. There is no particular point to the AH scenario – nothing thought-provoking is done with it – while the idea of the heroine being snatched

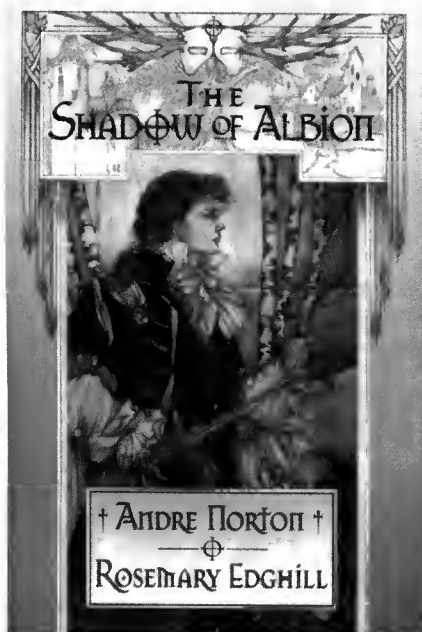
from another time-line seems quite redundant. Sure, she's a gutsy backwoods gal, made to play – and subvert – the role of an English lady, but we didn't need magic to set that up. The use of various real historical figures is also disappointing – the Marquis de Sade puts in an appearance, but if you didn't know what he was famous for, you'd never guess from this. *The 120 Days of Sodom* this is not.

There's more life in *Before and After* (Voyager, £5.99), the first novel by young British writer Matthew Thomas. This is comic fantasy of an exuberant and extravagant sort, in which crazy old academic Professor Nostrus – actually the "seriously old" Nostradamus – along with his student assistant Deborah, and Adam, a hapless young reporter, seek to avert the destruction which threatens the world with the advent of the millennium. Imagine *Doctor Who* (Pertwee era) as written by Robert Rankin and you'll get the idea. Bizarre incidents tumble from the pages – exploding sheep, the collapse of the Millennium Dome, not to mention 10,000,000 live fish falling from the skies over London. And that's just in the first few chapters.

To cap it all, the narrative is delivered with that type of facetiousness which involves constant use of bizarre or bathetic metaphors, and mock-heroic clashes of register – "Not since Samson had his bad hair day had the world seen anything like it"; "Megan was pretty as a picture" – the picture, it turns out, being Whistler's Mother; "Adam was more full of shit than King Kong's colostomy bag." And so on. And on. For 425 pages.

For yes, this is not just a funny book, this is a book that is constantly, relentlessly, in-your-face funny – which is, no doubt, why some people will hate it as much as others will love it. For my own part, I admired the author's skill in up-to-the-minute satire – from the National Lottery to the tabloids to soap opera to the Millennium Bug to televangelists to Welsh nationalism to the *South Bank Show*, there's barely a target he misses – while frequently feeling I was stuck at the bar with the sort of excitable, preening joker who digs you in the ribs after every punch-line, urging – with a grotesque grin – "Did y' get it? Did y' get it?" Well, yes... but this is starting to hurt...

That said, in a book as stuffed with jokes as this one, there are inevitably some good ones: I liked Whitebeard the Pirate, scourge of the Spanish Main, famed far and wide for having the correct number of eyes, hands and feet. Now *that's* funny.







The comic fantasy novel, I think, is essentially a species of post-modern narrative, tailored to the popular market. (All high-art innovations eventually turn up in stripped-down, popular form. Discuss.) Just as in Barth, Barthelme, Coover, some of Beckett, some of Pynchon – but in a much more readable way – comic fantasies present us with stories which ridicule and undermine their own conventions, self-consciously knowing, ironic works characterized above all by their refusal of seriousness. Everything's been done, these books seem to say; these old tricks can't fool us any more – but let's admit it openly, and have a good laugh.

Of course, other genres – the detective story, the spy story, the space opera – have frequently been parodied, but if we ask why epic fantasy, in particular, has bred such a vast and popular comic counterpart, the answer is not far to seek. Like the real epics of antiquity, sent up in the mock-heroic, or the high-flown romances of chivalry, famously trashed in *Don Quixote*, epic fantasy is a genre so portentous that it might almost be crying out to be ridiculed. Another threat to the universe? Another sword of power? Give me a break... Still, even Pratchett, for all his popularity, is a long way from running epic fantasy out of town. Such books remain the backbone of the fantasy market. The question is,

are they still worth reading?

Michael Scott Rohan's *The Castle of the Winds* (Orbit, £5.99) is a fine example of fantasy storytelling. Okay, if you're looking for something original, this is not for you; this is an old hand, doing something he knows how to do, and has done before. But he does it well. As the cover declares, this is a "Winter of the World" novel, a belated addition – but not a direct sequel – to Rohan's bestselling trilogy *The Anvil of Ice* (1986), *The Forge in the Forest* (1987) and *The Hammer of the Sun* (1988). I should add, however, that it functions perfectly well as a stand-alone novel.

Rohan's imaginary world is a medieval-type place, threatened by an encroaching Ice Age. Magic – for of course, there is magic – resides in the swords and armour forged by the "mastersmiths" of whom the hero, Kunrad (that spelling bothered me for some reason), is a particularly gifted example. Obsessed with his craft, Kunrad is bent on making the greatest suit of armour the world has ever seen – armour fit for a king, in fact. Now it so happens that a certain nobleman, one Lord Merthian, quite fancies himself as a king, and immediately sees that with Kunrad's armour he'll be unbeatable in the coming wars. Soon enough, Kunrad's forge is in flames, the armour is gone, and Kunrad and his two rather gormless apprentices – Olvar, obsessed with food; Gille, obsessed with sex – are

tearing off after the thief.

A long pursuit follows. I have to admit I've always been bored by the journeys which take up so much space in fantasy novels. Couldn't we just take it as read that they crossed a perilous terrain? No, it seems we have to number – as Dr Johnson put it – every streak of the tulip. "What's to see?" groans Olvar at one point, when our heroes are lost in an interminable swamp. "More reeds, more water, more marsh as far as the eye can see? Is there never an end to this place?" But fortunately there is, and when Kunrad and Co. meet one Lady Alais, whom they escort to the mysterious Castle of the Winds, the plot thickens markedly.

Not the least of Rohan's talents is his considerable descriptive power; though this novel – unlike the earlier books in the series – contains no map, it's hardly necessary, as the geography and environments are very clearly depicted. Swords, armour, battles and such like are also finely done, and the style – mingling elevated, elegiac narrative with fast-moving action and earthy dialogue – is supple and well-judged. Characterization is less impressive, but then I suppose there wasn't much of that in *Beowulf* either.

But that's unfair: Rohan is much more interesting than *Beowulf*.

Tom Arden

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The tale of how someone wakes up one morning with little if any memory of who or what he used to be, but pursued by sundry enemies of his previous self who either don't believe or don't care that he's now someone else, has been told many times – most notably by Ursula Le Guin in *City of Illusions*. That's no reason why it shouldn't be told again, but it entails certain pitfalls. Specifically, the longer the question of who he was and what he'd been up to remains unanswered, the more likely is the answer to be anticlimactic; if, moreover (as often happens), he begins to remember odd things at suspiciously convenient moments, the plotting will look clumsy. Peter J. Evans triumphantly avoids the first, and his plotting is complex but deft; I noticed only two minor hiccups.

Cassandra, heroine of *Mnemosyne's Kiss* (Virgin Worlds, £6.99) had set up a complex chemical laboratory in a hotel room in near-future Nairobi when someone broke in, trashed it too comprehensively for the product to be inferred from the wreckage, and blew most of her brains out. Nanotech having restored her to some measure of health, she finds that though she speaks English well and can rub along in Spanish she has no

## Promising First Novels

Chris Gilmore

idea of who she was, what her plans were, or why someone is keen to finish her off. By necessity rather than choice she teams up with Royanne, a 19-year-old street kid who used to make a precarious livelihood secreting illegal drugs in special sacs grafted to her intestines until someone wasted her controller, and the game's afoot.

The women are uneasy companions and by the nature of the case neither has any plans beyond shaking off the opposition. That makes for a shapeless story until nearly halfway through, when Cassandra finds a target to aim for. Thereafter the tension rises rapidly, as peripheral aspects of

the underlying mystery are resolved while its core remains enigmatic until the last 30 pages. It's final resolution consists of a gruesome but exceedingly satisfactory climax.

This is an ingeniously crafted, high-tech thriller of a quality one meets all too rarely; the ideas would not disgrace Greg Egan, and though Evans can offer neither such subtle emotional relationships nor such limpid prose, he has no serious bad habits. Altogether, a distinguished debut novel, and I look forward to more.

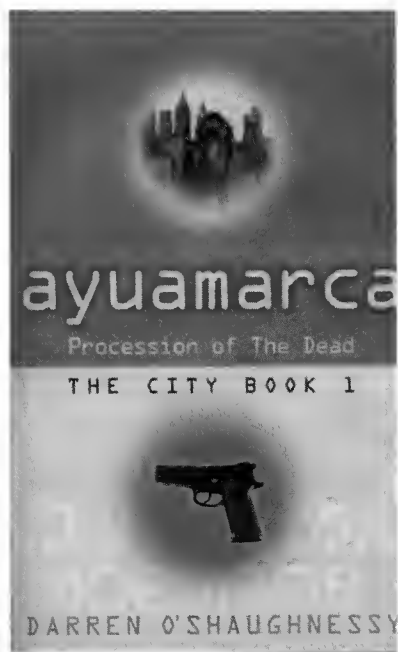
I think it must be catching. Darren O'Shaughnessy's debut novel, *Ayamarca: Procession of the Dead* (Orion, £6.99), also features a protagonist who has lost most of his memories, though by less obvious means than a bullet. Capac Raimi, whose Inca name is of central but obscure significance, arrives in an unnamed city determined to make good in his chosen profession of gangster. To achieve this disreputable ambition he must obtain the patronage of The Cardinal, the boss of bosses, on whose suffrance all businessmen (legitimate or otherwise) depend, and at whose whim they frequently die, The Cardi-

nal being a chaoticist who runs the entire show according to a system of his own based on pseudo-Jungian synchronicities.

That patronage is acquired violently, and with suspicious ease. Raimi soon finds himself elevated to a gangland analogue of fast-track management trainee, and (like all such trainees) he meets lots of new people. As they're a loquacious bunch the novel consists very largely of dialogue and Raimi's reflections thereupon, so that the book is well advanced by the time he realizes that while he has a reasonable body of general knowledge, he has only a few wisps of memory from before getting off the train that brought him there. Nor is that all: How is it that a woman he befriends combines the face of a teenager with a ravaged body that has seen nearly six hard decades? How can a freelance assassin have continued for nearly forty years at the peak of that demanding profession? Whence comes the choking green mist that occasionally pervades the city? Most of all, how do people sometimes disappear, leaving behind no gap, no record and no memory save in Raimi's own mind?

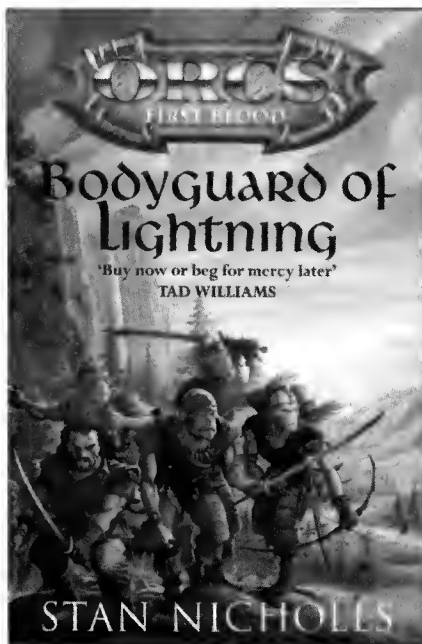
O'Shaughnessy's grim climax provides answers to all these questions, and leaves few loose ends; this is a self-contained novel, for all that it's sub-titled *The City Book 1*. Presumably there'll be more answers in Book 2, though there's no real hint as to how any sequel might develop. Meanwhile, I hope O'Shaughnessy can extend his range somewhat. He offers stylized but inventive dialogue, but too many of his descriptive passages are perfunctory – one of Raimi's memory fragments is the face of a woman who must at one time have meant something to him, but as we're never told what she looks like she arouses less interest than she should. Occasionally he's careless: at the crux of what should have been a powerful scene he suddenly produces an electric razor, when the context clearly demands a set of dog-clippers. Last and worst, his few passages of sex-writing are laughably inept, as he himself acknowledges, comparing one to "a schoolboy's masturbatory fantasy." A schoolboy of rather less than average finesse, I'm inclined to add; if you can't do it well, leave it out.

Orcs, as every schoolboy knows, are the degenerate descendants of sinful elves who were successively corrupted by Morgoth and Sauron to fight as their foot-soldiers in the eternal war of Good versus Evil. As such they have had a bad press; no one seems much concerned for their feelings, and I have come across only one book written from their viewpoint – Mary Gentle's *Grunts*, reviewed in *Interzone* 66, which played them



strictly for laughs. Now, in *Bodyguard of Lightning* (Millennium, £9.99, C-format), Stan Nicholls has elected to play them straight.

The first half describes how an orcish warband wipes out a human settlement in order to obtain a mysterious artefact coveted by their employer, the depraved and murderous witch-queen Jennesta. Then they lose it to a gang of kobolds, then they get it back with much carnage at every turn. When not fighting their enemies they sneer at each other and get plastered on a drug called pellucid. None of the characters has much in the way of redeeming features, and Stryke, their captain, is singularly lacking in the martial virtues: he is incapable of stemming the stream of racist jibes directed at the only dwarf



in the company, and his style of leadership involves putting all the most important decisions to a vote. It's an unedifying chronicle, which is not to say it couldn't be made to work, but for me it doesn't – the writing is not sufficiently distinguished, and the orcs aren't sufficiently inhuman. One might as well read about the exploits of a troop of mercenary guerrillas in Liberia (or Rwanda, or Sierra Leone, or Somalia – you choose).

Then, about halfway through, the story changes direction and becomes a Quest. Having recovered the artefact and been told that it's part of the key to great power, the orcs go free-lance, on the grounds that as Jennesta will doubtless kill them for incompetence on their return they might as well try to get the whole thing for themselves. Reasonable, but why should you or I care which repulsive faction gets to lord it over the rest?

Aha! Nicholls can answer that one. It seems orcs aren't really so bad – it's all the fault of us human immigrants. The humans in question look like the Amish and behave like the Taliban, a combination which ought to rub along well enough with the indigenous orcs, dwarves, elves etc., and to which no one objects. But they have also "raped the land," vitiated its magic and ruined the climate with our characteristic bad habits of mining coal and damming rivers for irrigation – as the orcs take to reminding each other, in phrases that would not be out of place on the lips of the drippiest Green Party spokesperson.

The book ends abruptly, but for those interested there's a second volume in train. I don't intend to board. I suppose it's just possible the whole thing is meant ironically and I've missed the point, but if so, so be it; we can't all share the same sense of humour.

Whatever you think of it, Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red/ Green/ Blue Mars* trilogy is easy to describe. The same is most emphatically not true of *The Martians* (Voyager, £16.99). It's set in the same universe as the trilogy, and involves some of the same characters, and as it's neither a novel nor a series of linked stories, I suppose it must be classed as meta-fiction. I can think of no exact analogies or precedents, but if you consider the relationship between *The Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings*; and that between *The Dune Encyclopedia* and Frank Herbert's two trilogies; and that between the extraordinary archive assembled by "Kirk" in "The Jet-Propelled Couch" and whatever was its inspiration; and the sort of material you might gather



while researching a TV documentary about life on Mars for people who had never been there, you'll get some idea.

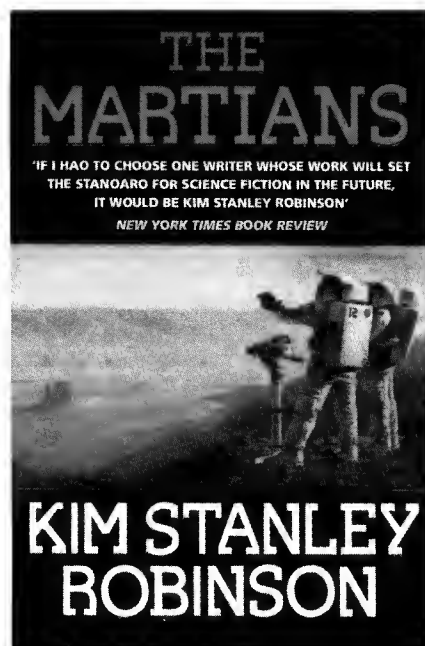
Something original, then; but whether it was worth doing is something else. Having finished his trilogy, I suppose Robinson still had some ideas about his world and his characters that he hadn't expressed because they didn't fit in, so here they are, explored in roughly chronological order – except that some passages belong to a different timestream, one is allegorical (though the allegory escapes me), and two apply extreme anthropomorphism to the most primitive forms of life. He ends with some slushily self-indulgent "poetry," mainly of the chopped-up prose variety but including some inferior terza rima, and a gruesomely fey account of his domestic routine of a morning. Don't fail to skip chapters 27 and 28.

How you react to the rest will depend largely on your pre-existing mental furniture. If you're learned in geology and passionate about mountaineering you'll get more from it than I did – the longest section (at 80 pages) contains a blow-by-blow account of an expedition up Olympus Mons, in the course of which nothing of significance happens except that

The border has been crossed, and an unexpected danger has been located. The first priority is to remove oneself from the potentially harmful situation; but what is the second? To warn those who might be following that something similar might occur, or to crack on to the goal?

The second question springs fully-formed from the skull of its predecessor. Does a writer who locates an unpalatable have any obligation to share what he finds by turning the facts into fiction? Should we be warned? One of my favourite collections is called *Men in the Sun*, by a Palestinian named Ghassan Kanafani. In the title story (the title being horribly ironic), a lorry driver agrees to smuggle people over a border in the part of his vehicle that is used to transport fuel. The day is hot. What no one predicts is that the driver will be invited to take refreshments with the guardians of the crossing. While he is guiltily quenching his thirst, his "passengers" are boiling to death in their metal coffin. And the message that emerges is: the kindness of one might lead to the destruction of another.

This story, and the facts of Kanafani's tormented life, returned while I was reading James Herbert's *Others* (Macmillan, £16.99). The plots are completely different, but a certain moral tone is shared. But for too many pages, it seems that Herbert's book



Roger Clayborne re-establishes relations with an old girlfriend. Elsewhere a woman looks back on the ordeals and rewards of raising a troublesome daughter, a man recounts how he improved the local standard of baseball, and someone unnamed enthuses about Martian homesteading.

## The Responsibility of Pioneers

David Mathew

will not be half the man that the 30 pages of the other is. Unpromisingly enough, the first chapter takes place in hell, where a roguish high-flying actor from the past is not so much doing bird or doing porridge, as doing bat, doing brimstone; this ex-party animal is here for the eternal duration – until he's visited by his demonic jailers and told he's been given another chance to live more respectfully.

Fade to Nick Dismas: a booze-slurping, joint-puffing private investigator, who is physically handicapped and a

The trilogy has cult status, so every member of the cult will want *Martians* for the sake of completeness. I hope they're not too disappointed, because I found it detracted from my memories of the trilogy. Apart from the sense of a barrel being scraped, the concentration on Clayborne emphasizes what I regard as the trilogy's great psychological flaw: no way can I bring myself to believe in the Red Mars Party, who would like Mars preserved exactly as it is now and therefore oppose all aspects of terraforming. Who would vote for a program of perpetual poverty, squalor, danger, discomfort and claustrophobia? Many feel the attraction of these things, but for them the Good Lord has provided religion; the promises of politicians feature wealth, ease, security, clean air and broad horizons – read any manifesto.

And talking of politics... Robinson offers the Martian constitution, which denies anyone, including the police, the right to keep and bear arms. At the same time, the newly terraformed wildernesses are being stocked with genetically tailored fauna which will, hopefully, come into balance some day. So how are they to be culled when the inevitable population explosions occur?

Chris Gilmore

connoisseur of old films. (Dismas is the redeemed soul, one life further down the line.) He is asked to find a man, whose mother is now not certain that as a baby he died at birth. Despite seeing hallucinations of flapping wings, Dismas tracks down the midwife who delivered the child, and the investigator's work leads him to an isolated residential home, where he meets a woman (also disabled) with whom he falls in love. The home is the key to the book. A mad professor, interested in the seriously and genetically malformed, is housing his various experiments in the bowels of the building. For years the doctor has been producing, buying and selling "prodigiousa," for which there is a thriving international market. Pornographic films, involving invalids and worse, are a lucrative market; and Dismas's new female friend is a star attraction.

What Herbert excels at (because by now his book has become compulsive, and terribly so) is descriptions of what used to be laughed at down Coney Hatch as freaks. As readers of *Others*, we do not laugh any more, although the problem with the early stages of the book is the jokiness. It doesn't work. There's a grabby quality at the start of this book which is most unappealing – a sort of begging at the beginning – and the reader feels obliged to appreciate Dismas's quips with his staff. But when Herbert

stops choking up his pages with matey banter, and once Dismas has found the nub of the book's horror, the specimens and experiments – the “others” – Herbert starts flying. The descriptions of the “unfortunate” others are enough to make one's blood sing in sympathy, or sing with a guilty sensation of horror.

The proof states that this novel is “controversial” (which seems to be jumping the gun somewhat; surely controversy depends on people having read the damn thing – people other than in-house staff and reviewers), but I cannot doubt that it will ruffle some feathers. In his brief End Note, Herbert confirms a suspicion by stating that the “story is based on a true incident.” I believe him, but the claim fails to satisfy any consequent curiosity. Why stop there? Name names, for pity's sake; point fingers; *inform*.

Something seems to have happened to Richard Calder since he moved back to England in 1996, from the Far East: he seems to be disappearing. He's getting smaller; he's being dwarfed by prose (not by ideas) that wails for more attention, now that it has been cast into the open. With *Frenzetta* (Orbit, £5.99) Calder scarcely makes an appearance at all – by which I mean that this book is dying for a human touch. In *Cythera* (the previous novel) the prose was burning-chrome and flashy, the language rich and descriptive; but to prove, as it were, that one should never judge a book by its author, in *Frenzetta* the prose seems suffocatingly stuffy, boot-heeled, and fat.

More positive comparisons between the two books may be found, however. The subtext of problematic love still exists, although the pederasty in *Cythera* has given way to a less conventional form of libidinous deviancy. The first-person narrator (Duane) happens to be dead, for one thing; and *Frenzetta* is “perverse” – a word used to describe characters which, since *The Abortion*, a cataclysm, have been born with the traits of rats or cats or wolves, or other animals. The first time *Frenzetta* has sex she will die: but it doesn't stop her trying to get her wicked way with Duane, who makes matters clear: “Zombies don't fuck.” In this European novel, they must find the place where their love will be accepted, and the most enjoyable section of the book occurs when Duane and *Frenzetta* are trying to dupe a duke who thinks he will marry *Frenzetta* and whisk her bedwards.

While I congratulate Richard Calder for his attempts to up the intellectual ante by introducing a high level of vocabulary and sentence structure, I cannot help but think that

with *Frenzetta* he has shot himself in the foot. Reading this book is like inching forwards in traffic: the victories are small and short-lived. Calder clearly knows a large number of words, but I also happen to know a large number of words, and *Frenzetta* felt like a duel. We were on a porch somewhere, playing banjo and guitar respectively, very quickly, each trying to outsmart the other. This was not an entertaining book, unlike its immediate predecessor. *Frenzetta* and I shared nothing; and it certainly didn't help that once I'd heard “French Setter” instead of “*Frenzetta*” once, it was difficult to get the real name back. Which speaks volumes, I believe.

**The Good, the Bad and the Ugly:  
the Ugly, the Bad and the Good...**

If Herbert's novel is ugly, and Calder's is bad, then perhaps the next one will be good. It is. After the headaches, fuzz and static of the Calder (not to mention the heart-breaking sense of powerlessness that one feels after the Herbert), it was akin to breathing cleaner air to read the latest from Orson Scott Card. *Enchantment* (Del Rey, \$25) is a mild-mannered, conservative, and fun take on the “Sleeping Beauty” fairy tale.

At various times, and with varying degrees of success, other genres have attempted to borrow the Sleeping Beauty idea: crime fiction (where the kiss might pull the princess from her coma), and pornography (where the kiss need not be to the princess's mouth, and where it always leads to something else anyway) are but two. Rousing the sleeper puts the one who does the waking in a position of power, however brief or ill-spent; but in Card's novel, the princess soon re-establishes the natural order.

She is Katarina, asleep in the Carpathian woods; and he is Ivan, a young boy who has recently been told that he's Jewish. (He must be circumcised.) He's good at running, and discovers the princess – and some ticklishly-sensed dark forces – while among the trees. The family moves to America, but the memory of the sleeper stays with him, like a prayer. Years later, Ivan is engaged to be married, and he goes back home as part of his academic investigations into ancient texts. When he (this time) kisses the princess, he is transported back a thousand years, where he defeats and rescues the princess, who doesn't much admire his runner's physique, and its lack of muscles and brawn. An uneasy relationship develops, because by rescuing the princess Ivan has obliged himself to marry her. Before long, the real evil in this fairy tale manifests itself: a black-hearted crone is pre-

sent, as is her husband, a bear (the one that Ivan defeated).

*Enchantment* is enchanting, and it resonates with the unkillable magic of the fairy tale it has followed. It is traditional in that Card tends to work in the lip-smooth grooves of the fantasy wagons that have rolled before. Given Ivan's precarious position between the past he has left behind (that is, his future), and the future he sees before him (that is, the past), one interesting question is tentatively approached. Who is the stronger? The dreamer unable to escape the act of dreaming, or the dream-self unable to escape the dream in which he figures?

Like jealous rival sisters, both eager to impress, Storm Constantine and Rachel Pollack have released their bumper volumes of short stories at approximately the same time. Neither Constantine's *The Oracle Lips* (Stark House, \$40) nor Pollack's *Burning Sky* (Cambrian Publications, £22.95) is a “complete stories of...” but both books, weighing in around 400 pages, are packed full of work of high quality that represents every stage of the author's career. Pollack's first published story, “Pandora's Bust” (from 1971), is here, and the ideas for one of Constantine's tales go back to when she was sitting an O-level exam! *The Oracle Lips* has 23 stories (18 previously published) and a so-so poem; and *Burning Sky* has 27 stories.

The pioneering spirit is alive and well. By which I do not simply mean to imply that the fiction of these writers wanders pluckily into hazardous realms, although it often does (often into the realms of sexual dead-babies). What I mean is, both volumes are expensive hardbacks from small publishers and, generally speaking, collections sell poorly compared with novels: for these two publishers to produce these hardbacks is as laudable as it is astonishing.

The Pollack is stronger. Constantine chooses a better title, and she uses strong, pencilly images, along with smoothly flowing assonance, to connect – to shine a light into the character's and the reader's psychological darkness. Example, from “Return to Gehenna”:

At lunchtime, Lucy slouched through a slicing rain to investigate the street of transformation. By day, it was its mundane self... When she looked upon the world once more, it seemed the scene before her shimmered, as if another place existed there, waiting to be focused upon, brought into being... She had tried too hard to recapture a dream.

Both authors write beautiful sentences, but Pollack knows better how





to freeze the heart with the flick of a phrase; her instinct for when to drop literary bombshells is impeccable. Any story that begins with a sentence like the following is off to a good start: "Sometimes I think of my clitoris as a magnet, pulling me along to uncover new deposits of ore in the fantasy mines" (from "Burning Sky"). But apart from that, there are these: "The petrified circle, however, sound-proofed Gloria, who only stared at the bitter face that floated out of the moon, larger and closer, like a sex criminal attacking at night" (from "Is Your Child Using Drugs? Seven Ways to Recognize a Drug Addict"). Or: "A

beast stood there, green scales heavier than ship armor, yellow tongue longer and thicker than a cobra and snaking out from a gateway of fanged teeth, hooded eyes bulging in a head all lumps of stone. Four wings unfolded across the entire sky, and then the largest creature Cori had ever seen took off into the air with the grace of a gull" (from "The Red Guild").

Two points. The first is that one of my claims to shame is that I never got round to reading Pollack's award-winning novel *Unquenchable Fire*. It's there, on my bookcase, the great fat C-format version with the gorgeous cover and the (now) yellowing pages.

And the second is that to the best of my memory there are only three authors whom I discovered through their short stories, and whose longer work I went on to enjoy: Clive Barker, with *The Books of Blood*; Peter Carey, with *The Fat Man in History*; and Charles Bukowski, with *The Most Beautiful Woman in Town*. All of my other favourite authors I first came to through novels. With reference to Rachel Pollack I can sense the energy of a burgeoning literary attraction; I can feel the faith growing. *Burning Sky* is so good that *Unforgettable Fire* will not remain unread much longer.

David Mathew

**W**hy not judge a book by its cover? It worked for the readers of the pulp fiction magazines that flourished in the first half of this century, both here and in the U.S. If a particular type of escapist, fast-paced fiction was required, one knew where to go. Well, the pulps are back, in book form, with covers as lurid as one could hope for! (The words "ripping yarns" and "amazing stories" can also be seen: and the stories live up to such boasts.) Pulp Fictions has released a number of forgotten, half-forgotten, or never-heard-of pieces of literary history, at £4.99 a throw, two of which are reviewed hereunder. The two in question have introductions by David Pringle, and if you are interested in the history of sf – or how, on the skeleton of the literary past, *this* bone connected to *that* bone – his words should be read.

The first book is Edgar Wallace's *The Green Rust*. While trying to summarize the plot of any Edgar Wallace, one is put in mind of an eight-year-old telling a dirty joke. One can almost feel the audience's uncertain reaction and then hear the self-abusive slap to the side of the head, and the late addendum: "Oh, and I forgot: the vicar was *blind*." To précis Wallace is to juggle spaghetti: one will always lose a strand or two, but what does it matter? Some good, sturdy fare will still be served up. Richard Horatio Edgar Wallace was a pulpmeister extraordinaire. Born in 1875, he was abandoned at the age of nine days and was brought up by a Billingsgate fish-porter. After serving in the army, he had his first success (in literary terms) in 1905, with *The Four Just Men*; and then went on to write approximately 170 novels and plays, the most popular of which were crime or crime-related.

*The Green Rust* (1919) is of the latter category. A rich guy, on his deathbed, urges a lawyer to ensure the safety of his niece. The niece is unaware of the riches that are in store for her. The mad doctor, on the other

hand – the one who "assists" (hint, hint) at the bedside of the rich guy, most certainly is. (He is mad, but it's a madness that hides beneath a veneer of acceptability.) The niece is attracted to the doctor, but repulsed by the soak who lives elsewhere in the building. However, the respectable doctor was the one who bumped the rich guy off and the drunk is not a real drunk, but is actually trying to help the woman, in accordance with the wishes of the lawyer. Oliva (niece) is made redundant from her place of work and is employed by Beale (who is working for the law, although he is hardly forthcoming with this knowledge). Oliva is asked by Beale to become acquainted with the horror known only as the Green Rust. ("I can only tell you this," said Beale, "that the Green Rust is the greatest conspiracy against the civilized world that has ever been hatched.") Oliva is kidnapped by van Heerden (the doctor), who wants to marry her to claim half of the inheritance, which he needs for his dastardly plan. Which is? Well, that would be telling. The gem should

not be scratched; and for that matter, the spaghetti should not be overboiled (the latter is a very oblique clue).

*The Green Rust* will take an afternoon or two to read – and will be admired. It is wonderful. Sure enough, there are silly errors: there is too much repetition, for one thing; but originally the story was published in the *Popular Magazine* "in four parts, 7th-28th August 1919" and the occasional reminder would have been desirable in that context. Similarly, conversations are teased out; but these are minor quibbles, and the element of teasing is present throughout anyway. Even by page 147 (with the text running to 255 pages), the reader has no real idea what the Green Rust actually is, or does.

**T**he second pulp classic is Jules Verne's *Dropped From the Clouds*, the first instalment in a trilogy entitled *The Mysterious Island*, which was published between 1874 and 1875. A group of Civil War prisoners escapes by a balloon which, before long, while in the throes of a storm, starts to angle, ever more insistently, towards the escapees' possible doom. "Perceiving their danger, the passengers cast away the last articles which still weighted down the car, the few provisions they had kept, everything, even to their pocket-knives..." Without provisions, without tools, they land on an island, or rather on "an islet – not more than two miles in length, with even a less breadth." The intrepid explorers find the engineer, who has become detached from the group, and they set about creating a standard of life, as it were, from ground zero. They learn to light fire; to cook (even baking eggs); to make bows-and-arrows, pottery, utensils; eventually, they even make nitroglycerine, which is used to blow open a mine hole that they dig. They fight for their food, they discover underground caverns, and they learn how to launder effectively. (Rather less pleasantly, there are scenes of seal-bashing.) Seasons

## Crisis Energy

David Mathew

pass, and the only route open is to learn about the future. The group displays what might be called crisis energy: the sort that defies the rules and comes from nowhere. They pull together: to name the island; to live harmoniously in a system that, with no women present, is ultimately doomed. The scene is set for volume two.

Pulp Fictions is a forearm around the throat of a struggling swimmer; these tales must be dragged to safety, where they can be examined. Despite the flaws and inadequacies that will show up from time to time in this series, the idea is excellent. We should keep the past alive, if we can; it's the only past we have. Besides, if the story becomes too much to read, there are always the advertisements at the back of each book, which have been reproduced from old magazines. Some choice examples are: "Learn Meat Cutting At Home – In Spare Time." "Monastery Secrets... The Forbidden Knowledge of Tibet." "Stammer?" "Stop Scratching: It May Cause Infection." No, they simply do not make them like this any more.

Nancy Kilpatrick has also written a trilogy, called *Power of the Blood*, and there is a good reason why it does not seem as original as either of the two books mentioned above. She is writing about vampires, and one school of thought states that if an author is to tackle such a well-known subject he or she must bring something new to the table. It is not a school at which Kilpatrick is a student (or a teacher), however; but she seems to have set up a rival academy, which advocates, instead of originality, the presence of a plot that is told with breakneck velocity. This reviewer has never read an entire trilogy – and this one weighs in at a little under 900 pages – so quickly. The pace is awesome, at least in part because there is little for the reader's mind to get snagged on, beyond the central problem which concerns the books' identity crisis. The style of writing, which is of astonishing simplicity, clashes with the subject matter, which is often bleak and complicated; the writing seems too thin to support some of Kilpatrick's ideas, which is when she resorts to strings of clichés ("Carol's heart worked overtime," "...over the proverbial barrel..."). And furthermore, on the subject of identity, the books deal with vampires – but they are not horror novels. It is possible (and perfectly reasonable) that Kilpatrick intended the books to be for Goths, rather than for traditional horror fans; but this supposition says unfortunate things for Goths. It says that they cannot

read to a higher level than the work that is being presented here.

The trilogy – *Child of the Night* (1996), *Near Death* (1996) and *Reborn* (1998) – is now available from Pumpkin Books, priced £6.99 a volume. *Child of the Night* starts with Carol, who is in Bordeaux following the disintegration of her marriage after her husband's serial adultery. She is carrying the AIDS virus. She is bothered, while out for a drink one night, by Andre, who insinuates himself into her life by means of violence. A deal is struck: if Andre will refrain from sucking Carol's blood, she will do whatever he wants. Which happens to be indulging in oodles of sex in which he is the dominant partner: cue the porn... Little by little, Carol falls for him, and goes back to see him when she learns she is pregnant. But this pregnancy cannot be! A vampire cannot breed with a "mortal" – apart from once in a while. Having given birth, Carol is brainwashed into forgetting the episode, and it only comes out years later, when the boy, in a hippie-like group of groovy vampires (one of whom says "kiddo" all the time, and not only to the child) is nine. Carol wants to see her son, Michel, but also to re-forge the relationship with Andre. And at the end, the lead female character becomes a vampire.

If volume one is a love story, of sorts, then *Near Death* is a detective story, of sorts. David is a vampire in Manchester. He stops his assassination at the hands of a heroin-addicted prostitute from New York called Zero, or Kathleen, or Kathy. Why her? Together they travel to America to find out, and also to rescue Zero's brother (whom David learns to be her son, and who has been dead for two years already); and also to meet the contractor, Dennis, who points them in the direction of a club called the Cutting Edge. (There are plenty more in-jokes of this calibre.) And what has the mysterious actor to do with the contract? Did the murder attempt have anything to do with David's ex-lover? At the end, the lead female character becomes a vampire.

In *Child of the Night*, the woman tamed the man; in *Near Death*, if anything, it is the other way round. Both books are about the vampire-human interconnection. But the third volume (the least interesting) is set in the vampires' world, and humans aren't so important. This is the book that uses the child from the first one as the main character. When the vampires are attacked (a nice auntie-vampire is torn to pieces) the suspicion falls on Antoine, an ancient enemy who wants to be mortal. A plot is hatched in which the boy, Michel,

donates the portion of his 50/50 blood that will give the enemy what he wants; but in a manner that becomes almost farcical, more and more transfusions take place, and a second-player vampire called Karl, who has been around for the duration, is even made human again. It is all very messy.

To Kilpatrick's credit, she has done an excellent job of deglamourizing vampires. "You're strong, all right. And controlling. And a bitch, like all women!" says Andre at one point in the early stages of their relationship in *Child of the Night*. Kilpatrick's vampires are like real people, what with their vagaries of speech and the arrogance of their manners. There is no fantastical distance between them and us. Andre is a spoilt brat who is used to getting his own way; but he's just the ghoul-next-door. David is an inquisitive clever-clogs, who is into a bit of bondage. And so on. But the trilogy is an unfinished piece of work: all three books need a drastic edit. There are many clumsy sentences which should have been corrected:

"As different as he looked, that's how different she felt. Her flesh rippled with sensuality. She couldn't tell if this was the result of drinking blood or what – maybe she was imagining it – but the effect produced a confidence she wasn't used to feeling. And, being alone with Andre, the way he looked tonight, she needed all the confidence she could get."

But inside these books is some admirable young-adult fiction, struggling for breath and freedom. If Nancy Kilpatrick were to lose the sex (particularly volume one), the swearing (particularly volume two), and the dated AIDS angle (particularly volume three), there would be great scope for work intended for a younger audience. It would be a shame to waste that galloping pace.

David Mathew

**Editor's Note:** David Marshall, of Pumpkin Books, was most displeased with the review that Chris Gilmore gave to the trilogy of novels by Nancy Kilpatrick (Interzone 142, page 59). We are sorry that the review was upsetting to both Mr Marshall, as publisher, and Ms Kilpatrick, as author, although we stand by the right of our reviewers to express their genuine opinions as long as they do so in words which are not libellous or downright defamatory. We offered Pumpkin Books the benefit of a "re-review" by another reviewer, David Mathew, of the same three books – which is now printed above. Many thanks to David Mathew for stepping into the breach.

David Pringle

Shortly after the demise of *Arcane*, the independent role-playing magazine, I came across a picture in a small fanzine that I took to be exemplary of the UK sf/fantasy magazine market. It showed a field containing a cluster of graves, each stone carved with the name of a similar publication which had folded during the previous year. *Arcane*, the freshest of these, was just being filled in by a white dwarf which (in case the casual reader is unaware) is also the name of a widely circulated miniature supplement/hobby catalogue from Games Workshop Ltd. The artist obviously intended the picture to show that *White Dwarf* had slain the other publications (and this is a little over-emphasized) but I found the overall scene (as a summary of the situation) incredibly accurate. Genre magazines come and go and, each time around, fewer persist. The magazines I cover below are all promising, visually impressive publications, but how many of them will survive in the long run? Longevity is something of a golden-globe in the UK's volatile "semi-prozine" market, valiantly pursued but seldom won.

*The Edge* is an A4 glossy magazine containing film, video and book reviews, original fiction and interviews with established authors. Issue #1 in a brand new series sees a dramatic leap in the production quality with a colour cover and full gloss throughout. Editor Graham Evans sets the pace with "Millennium Fever," an editorial on what he hopes to achieve with the magazine in its revised form. As usual *The Edge's* central strength lies with its non-fiction, in particular stunning in-depth interviews with Jonathan Carroll, Iain Banks, Ken Macleod and Graham Joyce (the latter being part one of a two-part interview). Fine fiction comes courtesy of Michael Moorcock, Chris Petit and Graham Joyce. The highlight of the issue for me is, as ever, David Britton's "Punk Noir," the increasingly brilliant "L.A. Squab." I was particularly relieved to see this cartoon continued as I had feared Graham's new-style publication wouldn't have room for it.

Comment and reviews are provided by the editorial team along with Christopher Fowler's popular "View From the Balcony," a dedicated column discussing the impending death of horror literature.

*The Edge* is a magazine that deserves to succeed. The quality of non-

## Magazine Reviews

David Lee Stone

fiction on display here is at least as impressive as that found in any professional newsstand magazine. If Mr Evans can keep *The Edge* on its proposed bi-monthly schedule, it will certainly be a publication that's worth looking out for.



*Albedo One* is Ireland's leading magazine specializing in sf, fantasy and horror fiction. #18 contains fiction by consummate professionals like Brian Stableford and Hugh Cook rubbing shoulders with promising newcomers Harvey O'Brien and Nigel Fletcher. The

longest story in this issue comes from Tais Teng who, it would seem, is something of a phenomenon in Holland. Her works (consisting of three adult sf novels, three sf collections and over 60 juvenile books) have attained bestseller status in Holland and are fast approaching the same level in Germany. In addition to fiction credits, she also illustrates comics and book covers. I wonder how she finds the time?

Elsewhere in A-1 #18, John Kenny interviews Walter Jon Williams (it is an interesting piece (although I'm not a fan of WJW) and one that is full of unnecessarily downcast observations. I quote: "if George (R.R. Martin) is right, both fantasy and sf are dead." Why do veteran authors keep stating this, for goodness sake? Isn't there enough doom and gloom in their books?

Overall, *Albedo One* is an interesting magazine, and although #18 is not quite as polished as previous issues, it's as good a place to start as any.

In my last column for *Interzone*, I covered *Odyssey*, the new(ish) semi-prozine of sf/fantasy fiction. I'm now in possession of a more recent issue (#7) which contains fiction from Keith Brooke and Cherith Baldry, and inter-

views with Lisa Tuttle and Charles de Lint (although, oddly enough, the editors decide to exclude both names from the cover in favour of role-playing columnist Marcus Rowland). Even allowing for the rocky road of magazine publishing to take its toll, I still found myself gawping in dismay at an advertisement in the news section announcing that the next BFS open night will take place on Saturday 5th December 1998 (nearly two months before this issue was published). I also notice from the staff list that John Gilbert has taken over as "News Editor"; I wonder if this could be the same Mr Gilbert who edited the (now long-defunct) horror fiction magazine *Fear*?

It's certainly a slow process, but *Odyssey* is beginning to forge an identity for itself. The reviews are brief and occasionally fragmentary, but the fiction is more entertaining than previous issues and the non-fiction greatly improved. One day *Odyssey* may grow into a serious rival for *Interzone* but, at present, it still has a long way to go.

Last (but by no means least) we come to *The Third Alternative*. Andy Cox's



magazine of horror/slipstream fiction hasn't dropped standards once in the last four years and issue #19 is no exception. I'd particularly like to applaud the in-depth analysis of Roman Polanski, the director responsible for *Frantic*, *Death and the Maiden* and *Chinatown*, and the lengthy interview with BFS Award-winner Michael Marshall Smith. I'll also doff my cap to David Mathew; is this man single-handedly stocking the entire UK market with sf/fantasy author inter-

views? He's certainly a busy chap! *TTA* long ago reached a peak of excellence and should stay there for some time to come. Highly recommended reading.

*Albedo One* (#18), A4, 44pp, £2.95/£10 for 4 issues from 2 Post Road, Lusk, Co. Dublin, Ireland. Monies payable to "Albedo One."

*The Edge* (#1), A4, 48pp, £2.75/£9.50 for 4 issues from 65 Guinness Buildings, Fulham Palace Road, London W6 8BD. Monies payable to "The Edge."

*Odyssey* (#7), A4, 72pp, £3/£15 for 6 from 816-818 London Road, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, SS9 3NH. Monies payable to "Caliver Books."

*The Third Alternative* (#19), A4, 60pp, £3/£11 for 4 issues from TTA Press, 5 Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambs. CB6 2LB. Monies payable to "TTA Press."

David Lee Stone

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

**Baring-Gould, S. *Margery of Quether and Other Weird Tales*.** Edited by Richard Dalby. Sarob Press ["Brynderwen," 41

Forest View, Mountain Ash, Wales CF45 3DU, ISBN 1-902309-03-0, xiii+108pp, hardcover, cover by Paul Lowe, £20. (Horror collection, first edition; six long-lost stories and a poem by a prolific Victorian author, disinterred by the admirable Mr Dalby [with the assistance of Jack Adrian] from old magazines; Sabine Baring-Gould [1834-1924] wrote the hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers" as well as many popular novels, but he is best known to lovers of the weird for his ghost stories

[as well as for his non-fiction books on vampires and werewolves]; Sarob Press has produced a beautiful little book here, with original *Cornhill Magazine* illustrations by Harry Furniss to accompany the title novella, and in doing so has performed a real service for connoisseurs of the *outré*; more Dalby-edited volumes are promised, by authors more obscure – has anyone apart from Dalby [and Jack Adrian] even heard of such late-Victorian writers as Lettice Galbraith and Mary E. Penn? – but we look forward to them; meanwhile, the present item is highly recommended.) *Late entry: January publication, received in March 1999.*

*Margery of Quether and Other Weird Tales*



S. Baring-Gould Edited by Richard Dalby

Barrett, David V. ***Secret Societies: From the Ancient and Arcane to the Modern and Clan-destine*.** Blandford, ISBN 0-7137-2772-1, 256pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (History of bizarre, esoteric and occult groups, some of them of science-fictional interest [Rosicrucians, Illuminati, etc]; first published in 1997 [we never saw the hardcover]; a follow-up to the same author's *Sects, 'Cults' and Alternative Religions* [1996; reviewed by Molly Brown in *Interzone* 135]; illustrated with line drawings and eight pages of photographs, it looks to be very interesting, informative and fair-minded; Barrett is known within the sf world as a short-story writer, editor of the anthology *Digital Dreams* [1990] and contributor of reviews and interviews to *Interzone* and elsewhere.) *8th April 1999.*

Bear, Greg. ***Darwin's Radio*.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-225731-9, S12pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA [?] 1999; proof copy received; although indubitably hard sf, it's described as a "missing-link thriller," and is being marketed for the mainstream Michael Crichton audience, rather than as part of HarperCollins's more generic Voyager list.) *4th May 1999.*

Brown, Eric. ***Penumbra*.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-592-3, 346pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; the author's third novel [not counting his two kids' books in the "Web" series], following *Meridian Days* [1992] and *Engineman* [1994];

Stephen Baxter and Peter F. Hamilton praise it on the cover.) *18th March 1999.*

Bunch, Chris. ***The Demon King*.** "The fantasy epic of empire, power and magic continues." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-761-7, S51pp, A-format paperback, cover by Keith Scaiffe [not "Scarfe," as it states], £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1998; second in a trilogy which began with *The Seer King* but which seems to be lacking an overall title.) *25th March 1999.*

Bunch, Chris. ***The Warrior King*.** "The final volume in the epic tale of empire and magic." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-757-9, 366pp, C-format paperback, cover by Keith Scaiffe, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1999; third in the trilogy which began with *The Seer King*.) *25th March 1999.*

Cadigan, Pat. ***Patterns*.** Introduction by Bruce Sterling. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86837-S, xi+207pp, trade paperback, \$13.95. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1989; 14 cyberpunkish stories, reprinted from Asimov's, *F&SF*, *Omni* and elsewhere.) *5th March 1999.*

Charnas, Suzy McKee. ***The Conqueror's Child*.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85719-S, 428pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a long-

delayed conclusion to the sequence which began with *Walk to the End of the World* [1974 – William S. Burroughs admired it!], *Motherlines* [1978] and *The Furies* [1994].) *May 1999.*

**Clement, Hal. *The Essential Hal Clement, Volume 1: Trio for Slide Rule and Typewriter*.**

Edited by Mark L. Olson and Anthony R. Lewis. Introduction by Poul Anderson. NESFA Press [PO Box 809, Framingham, MA 01701-0809, USA], ISBN 1-886788-06-X, S18pp, hardcover, cover by the author, \$25. (Sf omnibus, first edition; it contains the three hard-sf novels *Needle*, *Iceworld* and *Close to Critical*, all first serialized in the magazine *Astounding SF*, May-June 1949, October-December 1951 and May-July 1958, and previously published as separate books in 1950, 1953 and 1964; "Hal Clement" is the pseudonym of Harry C. Stubbs; another nicely-produced NESFA volume.) *25th April 1999.*

Clute, John, and John Grant, eds. ***The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*.** Contributing editors Mike Ashley, Roz Kaveney, David Langford, Ron Tiner. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-893-1, xvi+1076pp, C-format paperback, cover by Peter Goodfellow, £19.99. (Fantasy encyclopedia, first published in 1997; companion volume to *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* [1993]; winner of the World Fantasy Award and the Hugo Award; a huge book, over a million words in length, its 1,000-plus pages of double-column small print are crammed with information about fantasy in all its forms – "literature, cinema, television, opera, art and comics"; in addition to the named contributing editors, sizeable chunks of the book were written by such American experts as Gregory Feeley, David G. Hartwell and Gary Westfahl; a tremendous project, highly recommended; this sturdy paperback edition

**The Essential Hal Clement**



Volume 1

**Trio for Slide Rule & Typewriter**



**BOOKS RECEIVED**

**MARCH 1999**

contains a new 25-page "Addenda and Corrigenda" which, among other things, contains entries on Alasdair Gray, Shirley Jackson, Chuck Jones [animator], Gwyneth Jones, Japanese Manga and Russian Fantasy, all of which were accidentally omitted from the hardcover edition.) *1st April 1999.*

Costa, Margaret Jull, and Annella McDermott, eds. ***The Dedalus Book of Spanish Fantasy*.** Translated by the editors. Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-18-6, 359pp, B-format paperback, £10.99. (Literary fantasy anthology, first edition; another interesting volume from Dedalus: according to the blurb, it contains "texts from the middle of the 19th century to the present day, by authors writing in Castilian, Basque, Catalan and Galician... Most have never previously been translated into English"; the writers, who

are ordered alphabetically [we would have preferred a chronological arrangement ourselves] range from the Basque Bernardo Atxaga [born 1951], through the Catalan Eduardo Mendoza [born 1943; his is "an engaging tale of aliens landing in Barcelona" – did they feel right at home among the weird Gaudi architecture, we wonder?] to the Castilian Alonso Zamora Vicente [born 1916].) *21st April 1999.*

Deitz, Tom. ***Warstalker's Track*.** Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-78650-8, 375pp, A-format paperback, \$6.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition; latest in this Georgia-based author's loose series of light fantasies which began with *Windmaster's Bane* [1986].) *April 1999.*

Douglass, Sara. ***Starman: Book Three of The Axis Trilogy*.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-651108-2, xvi+733pp, A-format paperback, cover by Shaun Tan, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in Australia, 1996; it goes to show Aussies can do Big Fat Commercial Fantasies just like anyone else – or possibly better.) *6th April 1999.*





Dozois, Gardner, ed. **The Year's Best Science Fiction: Sixteenth Annual Collection**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-20963-0, 629pp, hardcover, \$29.95. (Sf anthology, first edition; proof copy received; there will be a simultaneous trade paperback edition priced at \$17.95; this incomplete proof does not contain the introduction and year's summation, which normally comprises more than 50 Roman-numeralled pages; it contains stories by William Barton, Stephen Baxter, Ted Chiang, Tony Daniel, Greg Egan, Geoffrey A. Landis, Ursula Le Guin, Paul J. McAuley, Ian McDonald, Ian R. MacLeod, Robert Reed, William Browning Spencer, Bruce Sterling, Michael Swanwick, Howard Waldrop, Cherry Wilder, Liz Williams [a new British writer – well done!], Robert Charles Wilson and several others; two of the stories are from *Interzone* – Gwyneth Jones's "La Cenerentola" and Tanith Lee's "Jedella Ghost"; recommended, as usual.) June 1999.

Erikson, Steven. **Gardens of the Moon: A Tale of the Malazan Book of the Fallen**. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-04470-3, xiv+523pp, C-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; yet another Big Commercial Fantasy debut by an unknown new writer: in this case, although he lives in Britain, he is Canadian-born and seems to have spent time in the USA; but this Steven "Erikson" [sic] should not be confused with Steve Erickson [born 1950], the well-established American novelist who has written some works bordering on sf and fantasy.) 8th April 1999.

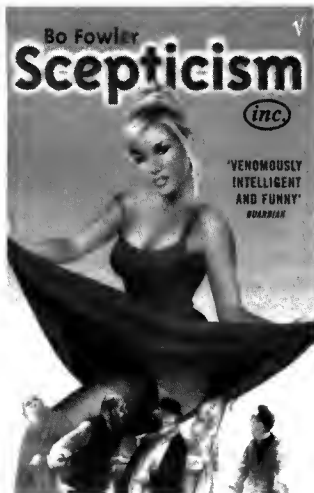
Farland, David. **Brotherhood of the Wolf: Book 2 of The Runelords**. Earthlight, ISBN 0-684-86055-4, S96pp, C-format paperback, cover by Darrell K. Sweet, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; "David Farland" is a pseudonym of Dave Wolverton.) 4th May 1999.

Farland, David. **The Sum of All Men**. "Book 1 of The Runelords." Earthlight, ISBN 0-671-02261-X, 661pp, A-format paperback, cover by Darrell K. Sweet, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1998; "David Farland" is a pseudonym of Mormon sf writer Dave Wolverton [a co-religionist of Orson Scott Card, who endorses this book on its back cover]; reviewed by David L. Stone in *Interzone* 135.) 4th May 1999.

Feist, Raymond E. **Shards of a Broken Crown**. "The Thrilling Conclusion to The Serpentwar Saga." Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-78983-3, xiv+514pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1998; it includes a 14-page afterword, "The World of Midkemia: A Primer," which doesn't seem to have been in the British editions.) April 1999.

Feist, Raymond E. **Shards of a Broken Crown**. "Volume Four of the Serpentwar Saga." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648348-8, 498pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1998.) 6th April 1998.

Fowler, Bo. **The Astrological Diary of God**. Cape, ISBN 0-224-05165-2, 296pp, C-format paperback, £10. (Humorous fantasy [?] novel, first edition; Fowler's second book, following *Scepticism Inc.* [1998] – "if that was weird, this is weirder," says the blurb here.) 8th April 1999.



Fowler, Bo. **Scepticism Inc.** Vintage, ISBN 0-09-927468-X, 248pp, B-format paperback, cover by Larry Rostant, £5.99. (Humorous sf/fantasy novel, first published in 1998; a debut novel by a new British writer, born 1971, it's set in the 21st century and is narrated by a supermarket trolley; a "mainstream" presentation by an author who studied creative writing under Malcolm Bradbury at the University of East Anglia; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 135.) 1st April 1999.

Gaiman, Neil. **Stardust**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-7419-3, 238pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1999; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; quite short [set in fairly large type with wide margins], it's a latter-day tale of Faerie, in the vein of those minor classics of the 1920s, Hope Mirrlees's *Lud-in-the-Mist* and Lord Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter*; it's dedicated "For Gene and Rosemary Wolfe," and carries a poem by John Donne as an epigraph; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 140.) 24th June 1999.

Goldstein, Lisa. **Dark Cities Underground**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86828-6, 253pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's not labelled as such, but this one looks as though it may be "young-adult," in the vein of Goldstein's American Book Award-winning first novel *The Red Magician* [1982].) June 1999.

Haggard, H. Rider. **Allan and the Ice-Gods: A Tale of Beginnings**. Introduction by David Pringle. Pulp Fictions [PO Box 144, Polegate, East Sussex BN26 6NW], ISBN 1-902058-11-9, xii+ 287pp, B-format paperback, cover by David Bezzina, £4.99. (Prehistoric sf novel, first published in 1927; part of the "Allan Quatermain" series which began with *King Solomon's Mines* [1885], it features a kind of psychic time-travel to the remote past; one of Haggard's better late efforts [Rudyard Kipling assisted him with the plotting and character-names] in what is probably its first modern paperback edition.) No date shown: received in March 1999.

Holder, Nancy. **Legacies and Lies: Gambler's Star, Book Two**. Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-79313-X, 292pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; about a casino colony on the Moon, "Moonbase Vegas," in a future where gambling is illegal on Earth.) April 1999.

Irwin, Robert. **Satan Wants Me**. Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-34-8, 320pp, hardcover, cover by David Bird, £14.99. (Literary fantasy [?] novel, first edition; the blurb describes it as "a novel

for anyone who wants to know what it was like to be young in the 1960s – if one was into amphetamines, weird sex and Devil-worship"; it is not clear whether there is any overt fantasy content.) 14th April 1999.

Keyes, J. Gregory. **Deadly Relations: Bester Ascendant**. "Babylon 5." Bantam, ISBN 0-7522-2113-2, 266pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bruce Jensen, £5.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1999; the second of a sub-trilogy, it does not appear to be derived from a TV-episode script, and hence is not a

novelization, but it's described as being "based on an original outline by J. Michael Straczynski"; the character called "Bester" has the forename "Alfie" and therefore really does seem to have been created in deliberate homage to the late sf writer Alfred Bester.) 12th March 1999.

King, Stephen. **The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-76558-5, 216pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Horror novella, first published in the USA, 1999; a mixture of horror, baseball lore and babes-in-the-wood sentiment, this is being billed as King's "surprise" novel, one which was dumped on his publishers without forewarning and which seems to have been rushed into print very fast [the author's two-page postscript is dated "February 1, 1999"]; reviewed – equally speedily – by Peter Crowther in *Interzone* 143.) 6th April 1999.

Lane, Andy. **The Babylon File, Volume 2: The Definitive Unauthorised Guide to J. Michael Straczynski's TV Series Babylon 5**. Virgin, ISBN 0-7535-0233-X, 286pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Outspoken and detailed unillustrated guide to seasons 4 and 5 of the cult TV sf series; first edition; Volume 1, covering the first three seasons, appeared in 1997.) 15th April 1999.

Lee, Adam. **Octoberland: Book Three of The Dominions of Irth**. Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-79072-6, ix+308pp, trade paperback, \$13.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; possibly first published in the UK by Hodder & Stoughton under the author's real name, A. A. Attanasio, as was volume one of the trilogy in 1996 – though, if so, we never received review copies of the British editions of volumes two and three.) April 1999.

Leiber, Fritz. **III Met in Lankhmar**. Introduction by Michael Moorcock. Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-810-8, xiii+450pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £6.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first published in the USA, 1995; originally from *White Wolf* in the USA, this is the first book in a nice new four-volume repackaging of all the late Fritz Leiber's "Fafhrd and Gray Mouser" stories; the present one comprises the books previously published as *Swords and Devilry* and *Swords Against Death* [both 1970]; let's hope they do well.) 18th March 1999.

Leroux, Lise. **One Hand Clapping**. Illustrated by the author. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-026748-4, 341pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1998; a debut novel by a Canadian-born author and illustrator resident in Britain; reviewed, enthusiastically, by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 133; it also got good reviews from *The Times*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, and from Stan Nicholls in *Time Out*; this is one of the many "unlabelled" sf novels aimed at the mainstream readership which continue to tumble from the presses in Britain but usually are not sent to us for review – for example, recent months have seen new sf [or quasi-sf] novels by "mainstreamers" Peter Ackroyd, Doris Lessing and Salman Rushdie, among others [even former government minister Edwina Currie has done one, set a hundred years in the future]; given that publishers are reluctant to identify these books as sf, the fact that this one has been sent to us [twice over] is probably due to the author, Lise Leroux, who seems to be an active self-publicist – she phoned us up once to bring her novel to our attention; she is an energetic lady in other respects too: "She competes in international formation sky-diving events," according to the brief author note here.) 25th March 1999.

Lumley, Brian. **Titus Crow, Volume One: The Burrowers Beneath, The Transition of Titus Crow.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86867-7, 347pp, trade paperback, \$14.95. (Horror omnibus, first published in the USA, 1997; the novels were originally published as separate volumes in 1974 and 1975; they are pastiche Lovecraftiana, in the shared "Cthulhu Mythos" orchestrated after HPL's death by August Derleth; a *Publishers Weekly* review is quoted on the back cover: "Lumley's style here is straight out of the classic pulp era...") *Late entry: February publication, received in March 1999.*

McCaffrey, Anne. **Nimisha's Ship.** Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38825-9, 388pp, hardcover, cover by Michael Herring, \$25. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1998; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 141.) *Late entry: 1st February publication, received in March 1999.*

McMullen, Sean. **Souls in the Great Machine.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-87055-8, 448pp, hardcover, \$27.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; Australian writer McMullen's second American-published novel, and his fourth overall; the blurb on this proof describes him as "a rising young star" – not a bad image for a author to have who was born in 1947 and therefore must be, ahem, 52 years of age...) *June 1999.*

Marco, John. **The Jackal of Nar.** "Book One of Tyrants and Kings." Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-568-0, 660pp, hardcover, cover by Geoff Taylor, £17.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1999; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; Big Commercial Fantasy again, by a completely unknown American author who comes with commendations from Allan Cole and J. V. Jones; it weighs a ton.) *18th March 1999.*

Mark, Jan. **The Eclipse of the Century.** Scholastic Press, ISBN 0-S90-S4467-S, 442pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first edition; Janet Marjorie Mark [born 1943] has a reputation as a distinguished children's writer; her big new book appears to be a Millennial sf comedy.) *16th April 1999.*

Matz, Marc. **Nocturne for a Dangerous Man.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86935-5, 495pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a debut novel by a new Californian writer; according to the accompanying publicity letter from Algis Budrys [who seems to have joined Tor Books as a Consulting Editor], it's the work of a "grown up" [which may be a coded way of saying the author is a grizzled olderster]: "The only writer I would compare Matz to would be Robert A. Heinlein – and I guarantee you I've never said that before, and am not likely to say it again in the foreseeable future.") *July 1999.*

Mezrich, Ben. **Skin.** "The X-Files." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224639-2, 261pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf/horror TV series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1999; based on the series created by Chris Carter; and who is Ben Mezrich? – presumably he's someone that producer Chris Carter trusts ["Trust No One": rumour has it that Carter has been difficult about these spinoffs, delaying publication and not allowing pub-

lishers a free hand]; the unknown Mr Mezrich is described as a 29-year-old Harvard graduate who lives in Boston and has worked as a TV production assistant.) *19th April 1999.*

Miles, Lawrence. **Dead Romance.** "The New Adventures." Virgin, ISBN 0-426-20532-4, 294pp, A-format paperback, cover by David Wyatt, £5.99. (Shared-universe sf novel, first edition; series heroine Bernice Summerfield appears to be offstage in this one, which is set mainly in the early 1970s – presumably around the time the author was an infant.) *15th April 1999.*

Miles, Rosalind. **Guenevere: The Queen of the Summer Country.** Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-684-85133-4, 502pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Arthurian fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; there will be a simultaneous trade paperback edition priced at £9.99; first of a proposed trilogy; according to the blurb, Queen Guenevere [sic] is "until now, a woman whose story has never been told" – good grief, tell that to Sharan Newman [author of *Guinevere* (1981) and sequels], not to mention about a dozen others who have laboured in this particular vineyard over the years; Rosalind Miles is, apparently, an "acclaimed historian and novelist... the author of 15 works of fiction and non-fiction, including *The Women's History of the World*...") *4th May 1999.*

Modesitt, L. E., Jr. **Gravity Dreams.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86826-X, 399pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; at just under 400 pages, the latest "monthly Modesitt" [to be fair, his first in six months] is small by his usual standards; it's described as "a stand-alone action adventure... set in the distant future.") *July 1999.*

Moorcock, Michael. **Tales from the Texas Woods.** Mojo Press, ISBN 1-885418-17-5, 158pp, hardcover, cover by John Picacio, £16.50. (Fantasy/western fiction/non-fiction collection, first published in the USA, 1997; this was published by the Mojo Press of Austin, Texas, nearly two years ago, but has now been made available in Britain through Jayde Design, 21 Honor Oak Rd., London SE23 3SH; it is the American first edition with a UK price, an attractive slim volume, and the contents are hitherto uncollected in any Moorcock book; most of the four stories and eight essays or reviews are recent, but one

item of fiction, "Johnny Lonesome Comes to Town," originated in *The Searchlight Book for Boys*, 1956 [when MM must have been about 16].) *Late entry: 21st February publication, received in March 1999.*

Parker, K. J. **The Belly of the Bow: Volume Two of the Fencer Trilogy.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-756-0, 442pp, C-format paperback, cover by Mick Van Houten, £10.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) *1st April 1999.*

Parker, K. J. **Colours in the Steel: Volume One of the Fencer Trilogy.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-610-6, 503pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick Van Houten, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1998; a debut work by a new British writer, apparently male.) *1st April 1999.*

Pellegrino, Charles. **Dust.** Avon, ISBN 0-380-78742-3, x+4S0pp, A-format paperback, \$6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1998; a near-future, technothriller-type disaster story by an author best known for his non-fiction pop-science books; there is a lengthy afterword and scientific bibliography.) *March 1999.*

Pratchett, Terry. **The Last Continent.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14614-S, 412pp, A-format paperback, cover by Josh Kirby, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1998; the 22nd "Discworld" novel; Pratchett has now "sold over ten million books and been translated into 21 languages," according to the latest publicity update; reviewed by Neil Jones in *Interzone* 133.) *13th May 1999.*

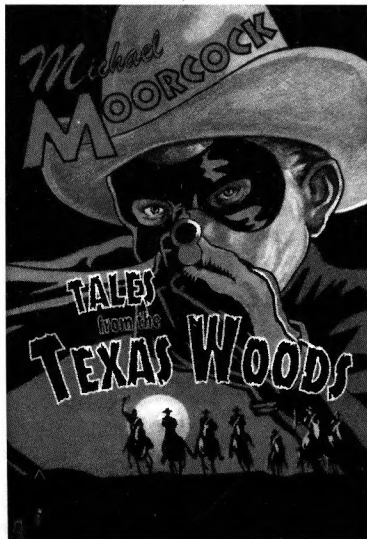
Priest, Christopher. **The Extremes.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-20541-4, 393pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1998; Priest's first new novel since his multi-award-winning *The Prestige*, it's another of his complex reality-benders, in this case concerning psychotic mass-killers and virtual-reality machines – all the more relevant, one would have thought, since the Denver school-shootings and the racist nail-bombs in London; short-listed for the Arthur C. Clarke Award; reviewed by Brian Stableford [a rave] in *Interzone* 138; even crime-fiction reviewer Jessica Mann in the *Tory Sunday Telegraph* liked this book: she found it "thought-provoking, terrifying and persuasive.") *14th May 1999.*

Reed, Robert. **The Dragons of Springplace: Stories.** Golden Gryphon Press [364 West Country Lane, Collinsville, IL 62234, USA], ISBN 0-9655901-6-X, viii+312pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$23.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; Reed's debut collection [after some eight novels], it contains eleven stories, all reprinted from Asimov's or *F&SF*; this is the fourth handsome book to be published by Jim Turner's new Golden Gryphon Press, a sort of breakaway from Arkham House; meanwhile, the venerable Arkham House itself is continuing publishing, apparently – mainly works by its long-deceased founder, August Derleth – but has not sent us any review copies.) *5th April 1999.*

Ryan, Frank. **The Sundered World, Book One: Tir.** Swift Publishers [PO Box 1436, Sheffield S17 3XP], ISBN 1-874082-23-5, 393pp, hardcover, cover by Mark Salwowski, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; Frank Ryan is a British author new to us, although clearly he has been around, having written a prior trilogy of [non-fantasy] novels, various non-fiction books and at least one play which saw production; this otherworldly fantasy comes from a new small publisher but is nicely produced, with a striking cover by well-known artist Salwowski.) *20th March 1999.*

Sawyer, Robert J. **Flashforward.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86712-3, 319pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the new one from the King of Canadian SF has an intriguing premise: "In pursuit of an elusive nuclear particle, an experiment goes incredibly awry, and, for a few moments, the consciousness of the entire human race is thrown ahead by about twenty years...") *June 1999.*

Scott, Martin. **Thraxas.** "A new fantasy legend is born." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-729-3, 220pp, A-format paperback, cover by Julian Gibson, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; possibly a debut book by a new British writer, unless it's by an established writer using a pseudonym; the





hero is an "ex-soldier, failed sorcerer and epic drinker"; two sequels are promised for coming months: *Thraxas and the Warrior Monks* and *Thraxas at the Races*.) 1st April 1999.

Shusterman, Neal. **Thief of Souls: Book Two of The Star Shards Trilogy.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85507-9, 253pp, hardcover, cover by Cliff Nielsen, \$21.95. (Sf/horror novel, first edition; follow-up to *Scorpion Shards* [date unknown, but probably several years ago], which we never saw; Shusterman has a reputation as a "young-adult" novelist, but this appears to be more grown-up stuff.) 16th April 1999.

Spedding, Alison. **The Streets of the City: Book III of A Walk in the Dark.** Voyager, ISBN 0-04-440148-5, xiv+338pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick Posen, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1988; originally published by Unwin under the byline "Spedding" and out of print for the best part of a decade, it concerns an Alexander the Great-like world conqueror; the eccentric but talented British author had the misfortune, many months ago, to be arrested in Bolivia on what appeared to be trumped-up drugs charges, and presently she languishes in jail.) 19th April 1999.

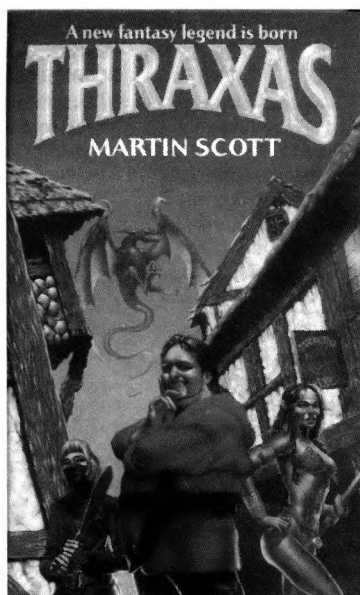
Temperley, Alan. **Huntress of the Sea.** Scholastic Press, ISBN 0-590-54334-2, 157pp, B-format paperback, £4.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first edition; Alan Temperley's name is new to us, but it seems he has published at least two earlier children's books; he is evidently British, and this novel has a Scottish setting.) 16th April 1999.

Tepper, Sheri S. **Six Moon Dance.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-651187-2, 454pp, A-format paperback, cover by J. K. Potter, £6.99. (Sf/fantasy novel; first published in the USA, 1998; it's in the author's favoured planetary-romance mode; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 140.) 19th April 1999.

Tolkien, J. R. R. **The Silmarillion.** Edited by Christopher Tolkien. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-261-10273-7, 439pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Howe, £6.99. (Fantasy collection [some regard it as a "novel"], first published in 1977; seventh HarperCollins printing since 1994, following three Grafton Books printings from 1992, following an unknown number of Unwin paperback printings from 1979.) 6th April 1999.

Turner, George. **Down There in Darkness.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86829-4, 352pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the final novel by the late Australian writer [died 1997] whose work was highly regarded in some quarters: "George Turner joins a handful of writers – names like Stanislaw Lem and J. G. Ballard spring to mind – whose works transcend national and genre boundaries" – *New York Times Book Review*.) May 1999.

Turtledove, Harry. **Colonization: Second Contact.** "The exciting continuation of the *World-war* epic!" Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-43019-0, 596pp, hardcover, cover by Tim O'Brien, \$25.95. (Alternate-history sf novel, first edition; yes, it's the beginning of yet another massive-volumed series by Turtledove about a war-that-never-



happened; this one sequelizes the "World-war" tetralogy.) Late entry: 1st February publication, received in March 1999.

Turtledove, Harry. **Into the Darkness.** Earthlight, ISBN 0-684-85825-8, 592pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1999; it's billed as the launch of "a new epic fantasy series... with echoes of the First World War.") 4th May 1999.

Utter, Virgil, and Gordon Benson, Jr. **Raymond King Cummings: Explorer of the Infinite—A Working Bibliography.** "Galactic Central

Bibliographies for the Avid Reader, Volume 50." Galactic Central Publications [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-53-X, ix+85pp, paperbound, £4. (Sf author bibliography; first edition; this and the following item are the first new additions [as opposed to revised reissues] to be added to the Galactic Central series in some time; Gordon Benson is deceased, and the book is actually copyrighted Virgil Utter and Phil Stephensen-Payne [the latter is the publisher].) Late entry: February publication, received in March 1999.

Utter, Virgil, and Gordon Benson, Jr. **Stanton Arthur Coblenz: Poet and Science Fictioneer—A Working Bibliography.** "Galactic Central Bibliographies for the Avid Reader, Volume 51." Galactic Central Publications [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-53-X, ix+57pp, paperbound, £3. (Sf author bibliography; first edition; like the above, the book is copyrighted Virgil Utter and Phil Stephensen-Payne; Cummings and Coblenz may not be names to set the world alight these days, but both wrote a good deal of sf material in the 1920s and 1930s, and these sound little bibliographies will be useful to those who like to track the leading pulpsters of old.) Late entry: February publication, received in March 1999.

Vance, Jack. **Ports of Call.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86474-4, 300pp, trade paperback, cover by Vladimir Nenov, \$13.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1998; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 136.) March 1999.

Verne, Jules. **Dropped from the Clouds.** Introduction by David Pringle. Pulp Fictions [PO Box 144, Polegate, East Sussex BN26 6NW], ISBN 1-902058-13-5, xi+240pp, B-format paperback, cover by Bob Covington, £4.99. (Adventure novel, first published in France, 1874; a reprint of the W. H. G. Kingston translation from the 1870s, bowdlerized at the time to soften Verne's anti-British Empire sentiments and with the principal hero's name changed from "Smith" to "Harding" – presumably because Smith was not distinctive or heroic enough [but Kingston missed the point: like his successor Robert A. Heinlein, Verne was a great admirer of Smiths]; it contains the original illustrations [artist not clearly credited; there's no statement of the fact on the front cover or title page, but this is of course part one of *The Mysterious Island* trilogy [1874-75] – a classic *robinsonade* which turns

into sf by its third volume; reissues of books two and three, *Abandoned* and *The Secret of the Island*, are promised by the publisher; the only previous UK paperback edition of *The Mysterious Island* we have seen was severely abridged [as a movie tie-in], so this set is worth getting.) No date shown: received in March 1999.

Wallace, Daniel. **Star Wars: The Essential Guide to Droids.** Illustrated by Bill Hughes and Troy Virgil. Ballantine, ISBN 0-345-42067-5, xi+206pp, very large-format paperback, \$18.95. (Illustrated guide to the robotic entities of the *Star Wars* sf-movie series created by George Lucas; first edition; this is the fifth volume in the *Star Wars: Essential Guide* series, of which, we are told in the accompanying publicity, nearly half a million copies have been sold.) March 1999.

Wallace, Daniel. **Star Wars: The Essential Guide to Droids.** Illustrated by Bill Hughes and Troy Virgil. Bantam, ISBN 0-7522-2413-1, xi+206pp, very large-format paperback, £14.99. (Illustrated guide to the robotic entities of the *Star Wars* sf-movie series created by George Lucas; first published in the USA, 1999; the fifth volume in the *Star Wars: Essential Guide* series.) 26th March 1999.

Wallace, Edgar. **The Green Rust.** Introduction by David Pringle. Pulp Fictions [PO Box 144, Polegate, East Sussex BN26 6NW], ISBN 1-902058-10-0, xi+255pp, B-format paperback, cover by Bob Covington, £4.99. (Sf thriller, first published in 1919; one of Wallace's half dozen sf-tinged books; unlike the simultaneously-released novels by Haggard and Verne [listed above], this really is "pulp fiction" – first serialized in *Street & Smith's Popular Magazine*, 7th-28th August 1919; we are not certain if there has been a paperback edition before, but if there was it must have been a long time ago.) No date shown: received in March 1999.

Welch, Jane. **The Bard of Castaguard: Volume Two of The Book of Ond.** Earthlight, ISBN 0-671-03391-3, 527pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a quote from *The Bookseller* describes Welch as a "wonderful author in the Robert Jordan mould.") 5th April 1999.

Wilkins, Kim. **The Infernal.** Oriel, ISBN 0-75282-167-9, 478pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in Australia, 1997; the author is British-born Australian, and this, her debut novel, won an Aurealis Award a couple of years ago; "Oriel," which we haven't encountered before, is a new paperback imprint name of Orion Publishing, used for their more downmarket fiction, crime novels, romances, humorous porn, etc; why bother? – an excess of imprint names, now thankfully abated, nearly destroyed Penguin Books a few years ago [at least in some people's eyes]; this Orion/Oriel item even has some of the characteristic "feel" of those – what were they called? – Penguin/Signet/Creed books... a bad example to follow, surely.) 11th April 1999.

Yarbro, Chelsea Quinn. **The Angry Angel: Sisters of the Night [Volume One].** Illustrated by Christopher H. Bing. Avon, ISBN 0-380-78984-1, 359pp, B-format paperback, cover by Bing, \$13.50. (Historical horror novel, spun off from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*; first published in 1998; the opener in a trilogy dealing with the lives of the three vampire sisters who appeared briefly in Stoker's novel, it's a "packaged" book in which copyright is shared by Yarbro and 5wordsmith Productions.) April 1999.



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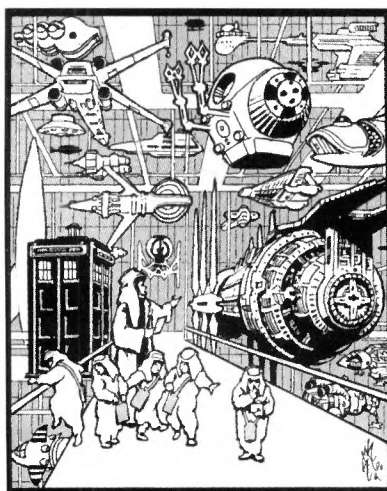
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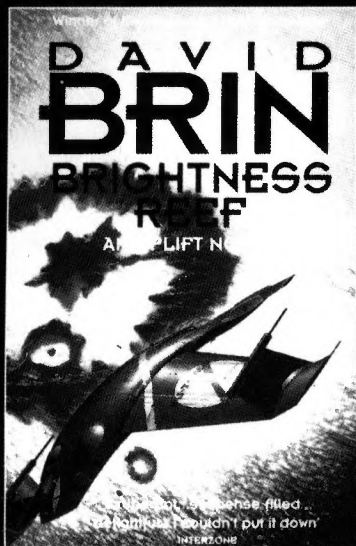


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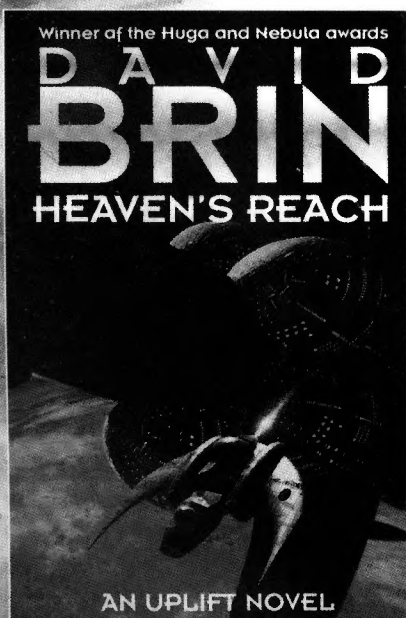
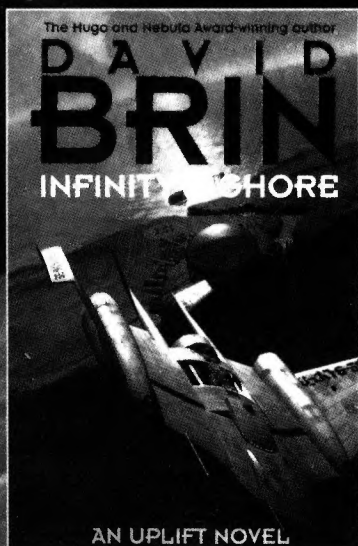
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